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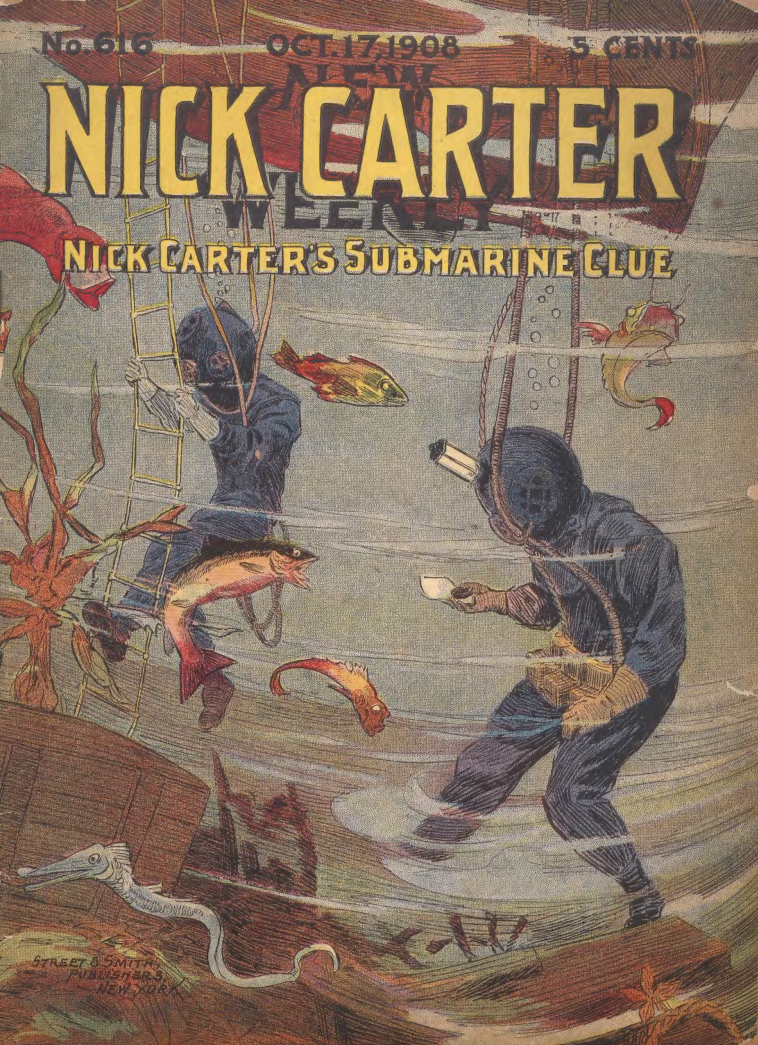
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

NICK CARTER'S SUBMARINE CLUE



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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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Nick Carter's Submarine Clue

OR,

THE WATER FERRET OF THE CHESAPEAKE.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

CALLED BY THE PRESIDENT.

"Mr. Cartah! Tel-e-graft *de*-spatch fo' Mr. Cartah! Mis-*ter* Cartah!" and then the black bell-boy glanced once more at the yellow envelope in his hand as he walked through the crowded foyer of one of the most prominent of Washington's hotels, and shouted again:

"Mr. Cartah! Tel-e-graft fo' Nich-o-las Cartah——"

His quick ear caught the snap of a finger from the row of leather-covered seats along one wall; his china-eyes rolled in that direction and he discovered a smooth-faced man who sat there beckoning him, and his black phiz expanded in a broad grin—a grin that displayed the largeness of his hope of a tip.

"Be you Mist' Cartah, sah?" he asked, standing in front of the broad-shouldered, athletic individual who had indicated his interest in the telegram.

"I am," said the individual in question.

"Mist' Nicholas Cartah?"

The gentleman pulled out a handful of letters and displayed the same name in their addresses. He likewise opened his card-case and showed the boy a dozen cards engraved with the name and "New York" in the lower corner.

"I guess you is de gemmen, sah!" admitted the bell-boy.

"I guess I am."

"An' dishyer tel-e-graft *de*-spatch b'longs ter yo'."

"And *this* belongs to *you*," returned the recipient of the message, putting what the Washingtonians call "a two-bit piece" into the darky's itching paw.

"T'ank yo', sah!" ejaculated the boy, and left Mr. Nicholas Carter to the perusal of his telegram.

"Something must have turned up at home," muttered he, with pursed-up lips as he slit the envelope. "Is this from Chick, or Patsy? What's doing, anyway?"

He pulled out the paper with some impatience. He was here in the capital city of the country on a very important matter, and he had left certain parts of the same affair to the care of his associates in New York. If things went wrong there, his work in Washington might be nullified; and Nick Carter was no more patient than the next man if things went wrong.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, when he had spread out the sheet.

The staggering typewriting of the telegraph-operator occupied but a single line beside the address and signature, and it was quite evident that neither of his assistants were trying to communicate with their chief.

"Will you call on me at offices immediately on receipt of this?"

This was the way the message read, and it was signed by a name that Nick Carter recognized in-

stantly, although he had never chanced to meet the owner of it personally. The gentleman was a secretary to the President of the United States, and a much trusted employee of the chief executive.

Why this man should have telegraphed him, and why he should be so peremptory in his demand, Nick had no means of ascertaining at the moment. Indeed, he was not in the habit of wasting his time and mental powers on unreasonable problems. Time would answer both of these questions.

The fact which *did* draw comment from him was this:

"Now, how the deuce did he know I was in town? I thought I had slipped over here so quietly that nobody would be aware of my presence. But it seems I might as well have had a brass band meet me at the station and a string of sandwich-men parade Pennsylvania Avenue stating to the gaping populace that 'Nick Carter is in town'!"

He chuckled, read the message again, and, thrusting it into his pocket, rose from the seat. As he did so, he instantly became aware of the scrutiny of an elderly gentleman who sat opposite him, leaning forward on a gold-headed cane, and evidently somewhat interested in his movements.

"Of course," muttered Nick, "that black abomination in buttons had to go yelling my name up and down these corridors. I might as well be a bride and groom on their honeymoon. Everybody will know me after this."

He was positive that the old gentleman would know him again, for that individual followed every movement of the athletic detective with his sharp eyes as Nick moved across the hall toward the desk at the end. And the stranger's notice bred some curiosity in Nick's mind regarding *him*.

Without showing that he had noticed his scrutiny, and without appearing to return it, Nick managed to gain an inventory of the old man's habiliments and general personal appearance that would have enabled him to send out a police description with unerring detail.

He was evidently not a Washingtonian, but a visitor. Nor was he, from all appearances, used to city life. His frock coat was one of the old-fashioned bell-mouthed variety, spreading widely when he sat down like a woman's skirt. He wore a flowered vest and a pleated white shirt that Nick could have sworn never saw a steam-laundry. A single diamond held the bosom of the shirt together, and he wore a plain, black string-tie fastened under a flowing collar. His hat was of the broad-brim variety—almost quakerish in shape if not in color—and the only change that relieved his black costume were the white "spats" he wore over dull-finished boots.

Fifty years ago one might have seen any number of gentlemen, dressed in similar style, about the Washington hotels. This man might have made his first visit to the capital at that time, when some twenty years of age!

These details, and the fact that he was abundantly furnished with silvery-white hair, was of rosy complexion, and smoothly shaven saving for a tiny, floss-white bunch of whisker under his lower lip, were all catalogued by Nick before he reached the clerk's desk. There the detective spoke a few words into the ear of the one who presided over the welfare of the guests, and then went out at the side door instantly and took a carriage.

Nick felt, like any other good citizen, that the call of the government was first and foremost in his line of duty. This message, emanating from the president's private secretary, was plainly of no personal matter. Nick was not acquainted with the gentleman, as we have seen. It must of necessity be of State importance.

It might even, under existing circumstances, deal with the matter which Nick already had in hand. At this thought the detective's mouth became grimmer and he shook his head.

"There are powerful influences bearing on the case now," he muttered. "I don't know how high they can go in pulling wires; but I have made up my mind once for all! I will shield no guilty man in this matter. It is too serious. It has cost too many innocent people their happiness and their money. It may cost more. I am going to run every last one of the scoundrels down—if I'm given life that long!"

Perhaps the thought of the seriousness of his present quest made him overcautious. It *did* seem strange that his coming to town should have become known so quickly. However, he took neither the first, nor the second carriage that offered itself. But he risked the third that happened by, and, stepping in, told the Jehu to drive to the White House.

The trip was not a long one and no accident intervened to delay him. At the steps of the door which he approached, however, a man stepped up to him, peered into his face, and said:

"Ah! Mr. Carter?"

"It might be," remarked Nick grimly. "But you certainly have the advantage of *me*."

"No offense, sir. Mr. Pyle is in the other wing. You can enter by that door."

As he mentioned the name of the gentleman who had sent for him, Nick bowed and allowed the man to lead him in by the door in question. It was evident that the stranger had been sent him for a guide, for they passed unchallenged through several suites of rooms and corridors and finally stood before a door at which the guide rapped.

He stepped back and bowed after doing so.

"Mr. Pyle's office, sir," he said, and, turning on his heel, left the detective to await the summons from beyond the portal.

It came very quickly, a resonant:

"Come in!"

Nick opened the door and found himself in the presence of Mr. Reginald Pyle, the secretary, who stood before a grate fire, warming his shanks, and with his hands under his coat-tails. While he spoke to Nick

he teetered forward on his toes until the detective half-expected to see him fall on his nose completely!

Mr. Reginald Pyle was certainly the last person, in looks, whom one would expect to find in the confidence of a strenuous president! He was tall, and thin, and dry, and looked as though he might have been born in a frock coat and tall hat—or, if not, that he had soon graduated from long clothes into those adjuncts of gentility.

He came of one of Philadelphia's oldest and most exclusive families. He had probably never spoken to a man of less importance than a bank president, or a university professor, a dozen times in his life—saving, of course, to his own or his friends' servants—and he would have considered both of those named gentlemen "in trade," and, therefore, somewhat out of his circle.

He shook hands with all the warmth of a dead fish, looked one up and down through a single-barreled glass as though he considered one a new specimen just added to the aquarium, and wouldn't have thawed out if you had set him alongside of Vesuvius in action!

Yet this "wooden image" had as keen and analytical a mind as any man of his day, was the best judge of character in all the chief executive's "private cabinet," as his special circle of advisers was called, and knew the politics, religion, upbringing, and birthmarks of every man, woman, or child that managed to get an audience with the president!

"Mr. Carter, I believe?" he said, with as much enthusiasm as a man would welcome his mother-in-law on a long visit.

"That is my name."

"Mr. Nicholas Carter?"

"Yes, sir," admitted Nick again, unable to escape the feeling of repression that seemed to fairly exude from Mr. Reginald Pyle.

"You are here on business connected with that stock-rigging job which has been laid to the Blaney & Lowell Co.?" asked Pyle bluntly, for he was a singularly direct man, with all his coldness.

Nick started and looked at him more keenly.

"Are you?" pursued Pyle, more sharply.

"I am sorry to hear you say so," returned Nick, grim-lipped.

"Explain yourself, Mr. Carter, if you please."

"I flattered myself that less than half a million people were in the secret of my being here," was Nick's dry reply.

"I fancy that *would* be an overestimate," returned Pyle. "But I happened to know it."

"Might I ask *how?*"

"You might." A grim smile on Pyle's part. Another on Nick's as he comprehended the answer: "But I might not tell you."

"Quite so," said Nick, nodding.

"The United States secret service, as you know, is somewhat extended," added Pyle, with cold courtesy. "And I was very glad that you *were* here and that your presence had been noted."

Nick's lifted eyebrows passed for a question, and the other replied:

"The president has expressed a desire to see you."

He pulled out his watch, looked at it, and came down solidly on his heels at last.

"He will be disengaged about now. If you will follow me, Mr. Carter?"

And so he led him out of the room, along the corridor, and into the presence of the chief executive of the government.

CHAPTER II.

A SECRET CONFERENCE.

It was not the great detective's first meeting with the president. He knew his vigorous hand shake, his cordial manner, and his wide smile, well.

"Mr. Carter! Delighted!"

"Mr. President! I am glad to see you looking so hearty."

"That is my desire as far as appearances go, sir," and the white teeth gleamed again. "No live man can afford to let himself get stale. Now, Mr. Carter, I sent for you on a somewhat delicate matter. Shut the door, Pyle, and come here."

The secretary saw that Nick had a seat before he secured one for himself at the end of the president's table.

"Of course, you are here in Washington on business?" queried the chief executive.

"Of course, sir."

"And Pyle tells me he knows what that business is and that it is not likely to conflict with the matter that I wished to bring to your attention."

"I'll be happy to do anything that I can for you, Mr. President," said the puzzled detective.

"The papers have been making a great hullabaloo over the leak in the Carney Railroad Holdings Case. I suppose you know that? Yes! Well, there is a deeper significance in that matter than the mere rigging of the market by the Blaney & Lowell Co. through inside information. That those men made thousands, while others lost thousands, has nothing to do with this administration.

"But the leak means that there is something rotten in the State!" declared the president, his eyes gleaming. "There is something vastly wrong when the decisions of the highest court in the land becomes the property of Wall Street manipulators in advance of those decisions being made public.

"If the people lose their faith in the Federal courts, as they have had occasion to in the State courts, the land will soon be in anarchy! This is a terrible suspicion that is festering in the public mind—yes, I might as well say it openly! There is a belief current that the justice on our supreme bench have played into the hands of the stock-jobbers.

"Mr. Carter, I am about to let you into a secret

of great public moment—and it must remain a secret inviolate until I give you permission to speak of it. In other words, until the act I am contemplating is an act de facto."

"I shall certainly keep my own counsel regarding anything you may find it necessary to tell me, Mr. President," said Nick Carter briefly.

"Of course! Well, I am about to create a new cabinet portfolio—one which the country has needed for the last two decades, and it calls for a head—a secretary, if you will—of a judicial mind and with the broadest of broad knowledge of the law."

He leaned forward and whispered the next few sentences which opened up to Nick's active and receptive mind a proposition of vast and sweeping significance as to the public weal.

"For this office I proposed to nominate Justice Simon Bernard," pursued the president, sitting back in his chair again, his face very grave and thoughtful. "It is a new thing, I know, to offer a justice of the supreme court of the United States an office of this, or any other character. But Simon Bernard is the man I want. A supreme court justice is supposed to serve for life, unless he is impeached. But he *may* resign. I have taken Judge Bernard into my confidence. He seemed heartily with me in the project I outlined. And all things considered, he is *the one man* in this land that I could see, able and willing, to accept this portfolio.

"But—and here's the rub!—there has been a serious leak in the business of the supreme court. As you must know, Judge Bernard was the judge who wrote the decision in the Carney Railroad Holdings Case, forknowledge of which made such a furor on the Street. Mr. Pyle has used our own special secret service men to good purpose. They have proved beyond a doubt that the Blaney & Lowell Co. began selling their holdings of those railroad stocks in the New York market *before* all of the associate justices—who had voted that Judge Bernard should write the decision—were informed themselves of the full particulars of that decision.

"As you know, the decision was merely a temporary grant to Carney's enemies. Judge Bernard stated that they had a right to a writ of certiorari. Naturally it was a blow to the stock of the several railroads for even such a temporary victory to be granted the opposition, and the quotations went down. But, meantime, the Blaney & Lowell Co. had sold out their holdings.

"With the stock-jobbing firm the administration has nothing to do. This is a personal interest, anyway—a personal interest of my own in Judge Simon Bernard."

"Mr. Carter!" exclaimed the president, with grave emphasis, "I must know beyond peradventure whether Simon Bernard had any guilty knowledge of that leak. Before I take this momentous step in my policy—and the policy of the country—I must be sure of placing the right man in the right place. When the time comes for me to nominate the new cabinet member, *I must be sure of my man!*"

The voice of the chief executive was stern with determination, and his closed fist, as it rested emphatically on the table, shook. Nick Carter, looking deeply into the keen eyes behind the sparkling lenses, realized something of the weight of responsibility upon the shoulders of the man, and something of his earnestness of purpose.

"Mr. Carter, we are informed that you are ferreting out some criminal acts of this stock-jobbing gang, of which Blaney & Lowell Co. seem to be part and parcel. Is it so?"

"You are rightly informed, Mr. President," admitted Nick.

"In following your present work, then, you may come across some thread which might lead to the unveiling of this mystery that troubles us."

"I might, sir."

"If you do, Mr. Carter, *follow that thread to the end!* I must know the truth about Bernard. It may lie in your power to help the administration as few citizens have been able to assist it. Will you do it?"

"I will, Mr. President!" declared Nick, and met the cordial grasp of the chief executive's hand again.

The busy, hustling nature of the man was shown by the way in which he lifted Nick out of his chair by that handclasp.

"Good-by. I'm glad to have met you again. Communicate with Pyle in secret. Remember! you have merely come here for the reception that takes place this evening. You would better appear there," said the President, in short, crisp sentences.

"Good-by again," he repeated, and hastened from the room.

Mr. Pyle, in a few words, told the detective how he could communicate with them on the subject, avoiding any undue publicity, and then introduced him through a side corridor into the great room where this particular reception happened to be held. It was not a large affair, but was connected with some small foreign commission, and there was not the usual crush of sightseers who wished to pump the presidental arm; and the president's wife was not present.

But there were ladies in the assembly and during the few minutes when the president was in the room there was the usual "walk around" in which most of those assembled took part that they might "meet the president." Nick kept out of this, thinking it unnecessary; but he stood where he could easily scan the faces of those who *were* presented to his excellency.

And this idle curiosity of Nick's repaid him amply. At the beginning of the incident, however, he was far from suspecting its importance.

First of all Nick found himself suddenly concentrating his gaze on a couple slowly approaching the chief executive. The man was large, with a shock of silvery-white hair, a high complexion, and who leaned on a heavy, gold-headed cane. He stepped haltingly as though either age or some injury detracted from his

natural vigor. A turn of his face and Nick recognized the old gentleman who had stared so at him in the hotel corridor subsequent to his starting for the interview he had just completed with the president.

On his arm was a little old lady who looked more like a picture of what our grandmothers used to be, than anything Nick had ever seen alive. She was rosy-faced, with a figure that seemed almost girlish, bright-eyed with excitement, and with soft, gray curls framing her sweet old face. Only the pretty wrinkles and her rather old-fashioned dress, and little, close bonnet, betrayed her age.

Such ladies might have swept through this very room, their Dolly Varden skirts distended by crinolines, half a century before. Indeed, in its long, straight folds, and general swing, her skirt suggested that she might wear some small wire contraption under it even in this late day!

She was a graceful picture to look at, and Nick could not fail to mark what a handsome old couple they were—and both dressed in so old-fashioned a style.

He drifted out of the room himself just after seeing them presented to the president by some New York politician who stood by. As Nick stood on the steps a carriage rolled up under the gleaming lamps, and the old couple appeared.

She was plainly excited by the little experience, and clung to his arm, chattering. At the top of the flight she released his arm, however, to pick up her skirts on either side, and showed a trim little foot, well shod, and a high-arched instep, silk-covered, as she started down the steps.

Then the unexpected happened. Somehow her heel caught in the back of her skirt. She pitched forward with a little, half-suppressed cry!

Nick sprang forward to catch her if he could; but the old gentleman was quicker than anybody else. He dropped his cane which slid to the foot of the steps. His hand shot out, and he caught her securely by the elbow.

Her fall was stayed. Her cry of fright ended in a little laugh. She half-curtsied to her escort in a lovely, old-fashioned way, and murmured:

"So kind! Thank you, John."

Nick descended, picked up the stick, and handed it to the old gentleman when the couple reached the walk. The other still looked disturbed, although he retained all his fresh color.

Nothing else betrayed him, however. They got into the carriage and were driven away.

But Nick Carter stood on the walk and gazed after them reflectively. And as he gazed he ruminated, but not aloud:

"A queer start indeed! Who can they be, and what does it mean? In masquerade? On my life they were! For when that fellow reached out to seize her, the muscles under his tight coat-sleeve swelled like those of a finished athlete—and he was as quick as a cat. Such muscles and such lightness of movement do not go with white hair, a halting step, and all the appearances of age!"

CHAPTER III.

SOMETHING THAT HAD GONE BEFORE.

Nearly a week previous to this Washington evening, Nick Carter's valet and confidential servant, Joseph, came softly into the great detective's office, on the second floor of his New York residence, and stood before the broad desk-table, awaiting his master's pleasure. Nick was busily engaged writing, and it was several moments before he looked up and asked:

"Well, who is itno w, Joseph? I'm rather busy, you know."

"The person is insistent, sir."

"Man, or woman?"

"A man, Mr. Carter."

"Name?"

"He offered me no card, sir, and he did not seem to want to give his name. He is altogether a remarkable-looking person."

"Well, well! Anything remarkable at all would be welcome, for things seem to have been as dull as ditch-water, as Patsy observed only this morning."

"Yes, sir."

"How remarkable is this man?"

"Most remarkable in dress, Mr. Carter. A sailor, or given to maritime pursuits. Wears his sea-boots with his pants drawn down over them and clumps terribly on the floor, sir. He's dressed in reefer jacket and a hat that's been folded in a box a long time, sir."

"Commendable display of observation on your part, Joseph," laughed Nick Carter. "A sailor off a long voyage, perhaps?"

"Something more than a sailor, I should say—at least, he's not a common sailor," declared Joseph. "He says he is very anxious to see you. He says that Mr. Mark Cameron sent him up here."

"What!" exclaimed Nick, in sudden animation. "Mark Cameron? Send him up! Send him up, Joseph!"

As Joseph disappeared, the detective spoke aloud, although there appeared to be nobody in the room.

"Some light on that bad stock business, at last? Too good to be true, perhaps. But Cameron telephoned me last night that he had got wind of something that might connect with Abe Grout. If so—— Well, keep your ears open, boys, and if I give you the signal, lose nothing."

There was a murmured "Yes, sir!" yet there was surely nobody in the room but the detective himself. It contained merely the ordinary furniture, with his high cases of card-drawers between the windows, his writing-table, safe, and half a dozen chairs. It was a room not ornately furnished in any particular, al-

though there were two or three good pictures, including a portrait of a lovely, dark, Greek dancing girl, with modestly lowered eyelashes, hung against the end wall.

There wasn't a hiding-place in the whole room—surely not under the desk-table, for it was open to daylight from both sides, and there was no screen, or article of furniture big enough to hide a man. Yet that respectful "Yes, sir!" was no spiritual voice, and sounded mightily like Chick's!

Hardly had Nick ceased speaking, however, when Joseph knocked on the door again, and, at Nick's "Come in!" ushered into the office a figure that certainly *was* extraordinary.

It was a squat figure that came in—"rolled in" would be nearer his movements—a fellow bulky to deformity above his waist, his trunk seemingly set upon regular spindle-shanks of legs, though not long. He was probably five foot six "over all."

A face bronzed like a copper cent and as hard as flint. There was a distension of one cheek—at first appearance seemingly an immovable lump on the right jaw. Later this proved to be merely the swelling over a "chaw" of "B. L." which he cut off in one hunk from his tobacco-plug and kept hidden in his cheek.

He was tarry-handed, gruff of voice, and had a certain directness of speech and manner that carried force, and an idea that he was too blunt and outspoken to be dishonest.

"Mr. Carter?" he asked hoarsely, taking off the wrinkled hat which Joseph had commented upon.

"Yes, sir."

"Your good health. I was sent here for a confab. You got the time?"

"My time is yours, sir," returned the detective quietly.

The sailorish man drew up a chair without further preamble and sat him down. He looked bulkier seated than he did standing, if that were possible.

"I'm Amos Ferret, of Baltimore. They call me the Water Ferret now an' then. That ain't here nor there, though. *You* ain't likely to want me to find anything in them waters. That's my business. I'm a diver. I know the Chesapeake like you know this here back yard," and he nodded toward the windows.

"I been building a sea-wall along Mr. Cameron's estate, on the eastern shore of Maryland, down nigh to Princess Ann on the Tangier Sound water. Know it?"

"I have been that way by water," admitted Nick.

"I had to come up here to see Mr. Cameron. I was tellin' him something odd that happened down that a-way last week, and he seemed real stirred up about it. He said you'd oughter know it. Now, Mr. Carter, I don't know you from Adam's off ox; but Mr. Cameron says you're all right, and he's a well-to-do man, and pays his bills prompt. His recommend I considers first-class.

"I got a little sloop, Mr. Carter. She's the *Water Ferret*. Named her after meself," and the man grinned suddenly, opening a cavernous mouth which seemed to lack most of the teeth in both upper and nether jaw.

"She's layin' in Baltimore now, waitin' for construction material for Mr. Cameron's sea-wall. While she's there, I run up here. Now, yer see how 'tis.

"This here bein' th' interduction, as ye might say, I'll perceed to spin me yarn. Mr. Cameron gets me ter talkin' whenever he sees me. Thinks I'm some sport, I s'pose. These city chaps—Lawk! it don't take much ter amuse 'em!

"That Tangier Sound is a lonesome place this time o' year. Ye know that, I s'pose? Ain't many pleasure-craft run in there behind the islands, though there's some o' the oyster-fleet that rake the beds there. In summer, an' spring, an' fall, there's plenty of them steam-yachts come down from Washington, or up from No'folk. Them big-bugs up to Washington is great for runnin' down there for over Sunday. Some of 'em's got fishin' places, or summer homes, like Mr. Cameron, along there.

"So sech bein' the case I was some surprised t'other day when one o' them fancy yachts run in to Mr. Cameron's moorings. I didn't know but he might be aboard, an' as I'd jest come up from a spell below, an' my pardner warn't goin' down right away, I walks over to the dock from the float we was usin' an' axes was Mr. Cameron aboard.

"He warn't. Seems they'd come in for to git some water and some stores their steward had forgot."

"This yacht, I presume, is important in your story, Mr. Ferret?" interrupted Nick, his hand sliding under the table, where he pressed a secret button.

"I should say it were!"

"What was her name?"

"The *Spoondrift*."

"I'd like to know who owns her and where she hails from?" said Nick, raising his voice a trifle.

"Sorry, Mr. Carter, but I can't tell that," said Amos Ferret. "And ye needn't speak so loud. I ain't deef."

Nick Carter's face never changed its expression, but he nodded for his visitor to go on.

"Now, you listen to me, sir, for I'm comin' to the nub of my story pretty soon. An' this is what Mr. Cameron said you'd ought to hear about—though what for I don't rightly see."

"Perhaps I can explain that after I've heard it, Mr. Ferret," declared Nick good-naturedly, and he leaned forward again and pressed the button under the table a second time.

"Well, sir! When I'd l'arned there warn't nobody aboard that *Spoondrift* I knew, I went back to my work. I had no int'rust in 'em, ye see. But as I sat on the float smokin', watching the line and workin' the air-pump for me pardner, I couldn't help seein' an' hearin' a part of what went on aboard that yacht."

"I see," commented Carter.

"Well! There was a tall, big man, and a short, squatty man, leanin' on the rail of that yacht, an' they was smokin' an' talkin'. One of 'em was a Jew man, I should say—the squatty one.

"Now, I never paid no attention to what they talked about, savin' that I heard a new cuss-word or two that I'd never heard before, an' I was savin' 'em up to give to our cook who's the blamedest, thickest numskull of a nigger that ever cracked the egg.

"Mr. Cameron, *he* axed me what them fellers talked about, and I couldn't tell him. 'Twas all about something going up, and something else going down, and whether the figgers they used was dollars, or doughnuts, I couldn't have swore!

"But bimeby the squatty feller seemed to git his goat up. He swore real nasty, an' says he:

"'Gimme that!' and he added other words too numerous ter mention an' anythin' but perlite.

"'Go to the devil!' says the tall man, and he was mad, too.

"'That comes back to me!' says the short feller, for I was takin' notice by then. 'Think I'm goin' to have you fellers holdin' that signerchure o' mine over my head? Not for——' Well, he meant not for a good deal.

"'It's lucky I got the letter,' says the other chap. 'You'd go back on us, else.'

"Yer see, I remembered this part of their talk all right, fer I thought there was likely to be a scrap, an' *that's* allus interestin'," explained Amos Ferret.

"Well, with that the short man pretty near lifts him by his hair, he was so mad. Says he:

"'You kin take me to the sheep-butcher an' I'll swear it!' says he—which Mr. Cameron says ter me is a way them Jew people have of swearin' an oath.

"'I wouldn't trust ye *then*,' says the tall man. 'I got your mark, an' that's good enough bail for *me*!'

"With that the little feller sprang at him. They wrostled at the rail, one tryin', it seemed, to git a paper from t'other's hand. Just then my pardner jerked for more air. I swanny! I'd 'most forgot him an' was laggin' on the pump.

"I had to git busy, an' when I looked up again—'twarn't thirty seconds by the clock—the couple was both leanin' clean over the rail of that yacht, their eyes buggin' out, an' them tryin' ter snatch at a sheet of paper that was jest settlin' done to the surface of the water. The tall feller had part of the paper in his hand. It had got tore in the struggle, an' now they had both lost it!

"'Now, neither of us ain't got it!' exclaimed the tall fellow.

"At that, Shorty goes crazy again, an' swears all he knows—an' it's a good deal, I judge. It seems he felt worse about it than ever. Somebody might git the paper yet. And most of the letter, or whatever it was, was writ onto the last half of the paper, and his name in his own handwrite. My! but it got his goat.

"So they spied me then, and they yells for me to catch the paper that was floatin' away on the tide. One of 'em ran to git out a boat, I believe.

"Now, I couldn't leave the pump but a few seconds at a time, and they was insistent that I should try for the paper. So I grabs an oar, and makes a bat for it, and the water splashes all over the paper an' she sinks like a stun!

"Down she went, turnin' round an' round, like a foundered ship, till she was so deep I couldn't see her.

"'Well, by gum!' says the tall gent. 'She's done for now for good.'

"And the little chap come to see it his way after a minute. They gits milder to each other, shakes hands, and walks off to have a drink, and didn't say nothin' more to me.

"But here's the nubbin' of the yarn, Mr. Carter: I went down meself in less than two hour for a spell at that wall. While I was at work—'tain't deep there—I see somethin' funny. There's stray oysters on them rocks, an' clingin' to the spiles all about there, and one big feller had gripped something that looked like a rag from where I was at work. I went over and took a squint at it closer before I signaled my pardner to help me up.

"And what d'ye s'pose it was? Hang me if it warn't that identical paper that them gents on the yacht had lost, and I'd splattered under water! The tide hadn't taken it far away, ye see, and as it floated past a big oyster that was jest shuttin' his mouth, he'd gripped it.

"Funny thing, warn't it? So Cameron says. And the thing of it was I could read it plain as print. An' that short man's name stood out like he'd jest writ it."

Nick Carter leaned forward, his eyes suddenly sparkling. The latter part of the story had held his breathless attention. Now he said:

"Mr. Ferret, shall I tell you that name?"

"Eh?" queried the diver, staring. "Ye don't know them parties, do ye?"

"I'll make one guess at that name, anyway," said Nick grimly. "Otherwise I can't understand Cameron's sending you up here. The name signed to the paper was Abe Grout, wasn't it?"

"Right! Right as a trivet!" cried the diver, slapping his knee. 'Abram Grout'—that was what it was. Well! that gets my goat!"

CHAPTER IV.

A SUBMARINE CLUE.

Nick Carter's guess had nothing of the phenomenal in it. He had recognized the description of the two men as Ferret had related his story, and he knew that Mark Cameron, secretary of the New York stock exchange, would not have sent him Amos Ferret if the man's story had not something to do with the case which the detective was working on at that time for the Exchange Association.

As for Abe Grout, he was known to be the financial backer of Blaney, Lowell & Co., a concern that owned a seat in the stock exchange, but which really ought

not to possess such a valuable asset if its suspected methods were proven true.

Blaney, Lowell & Co. had once been a solid concern, and among the oldest brokerage houses on the Street. But Blaney had sold out, and Lowell was dead. The concern retained the old firm's seat on 'change, and the men who figured as heads of the firm were decent-appearing and held themselves aloof from suspicious work that could ever be proven against them, at least.

Abe Grout controlled the company, and from the investigations Nick Carter had made, Nick was convinced that he had associated with him, and as an officer in the concern, one man who was likely to be the chief aid and assistant in the queer work of which the firm was accused. This was Paul Shade—Paul G. Shade. He had been a mine-promoter, a stock-gambler, interested in the old chain of Philadelphia bucket-shops, and, although he had never actually been arrested, or been charged with crime, he had escaped such charge and arrest by such a narrow margin on occasion, that he was known to the police of several cities as a "man to watch," and the Federal secret service men always had him on their list of suspects.

It is strange how many "near-criminals" like Shade escape serious trouble for years, while they prey on their fellow men. Usually they have conscienceless lawyers who tell them before they go into a scheme just how far they can work without getting nabbed by the police.

Nick had already taken notice of Shade. He was a man who traveled back and forth between Washington and New York a good deal of the time, and was very active in the interests of the Blaney & Lowell Co. He was a tall man, and would answer to the description of Abe Grout's companion on the *Spoondrift*, as given by Amos Ferret.

"That certainly is an interesting fact, Mr. Ferret," said the detective, in comment on the diver's story. "And the paper was really readable?"

"Pshaw! jest as plain as print, I tell ye," declared Ferret, the immovable chew of tobacco distended still farther for a moment's grin. "And likely to be so, too."

"What! you left it there?" cried Nick.

"Sure."

"But—but——"

"Say! lemme tell ye," said the Water Ferret, chuckling, and rolling his narrow eyes as he leaned forward. "I dunno as I need ter be a fool, jest because I've been under water a good ha'f of my life—heh?"

"I must say that you appear to me to be far from a fool, Mr. Ferret," laughed Nick.

"Jest so! Well! I seen what that old oyster had gripped holt of, and says I, 'Them fellers up there'll give suthin' to git this letter back—sure. I'll see how they talk.'

"So up I went. I'm sprightly enough, I take it, to see a way to make an honest dollar when it drifts across my hawse. All us Ferrets air sharp," and he guffawed again at his own joke.

"But this was one time I caught a crab, b'jings!" declared the diver. "That yacht had cast off an' was a mile away! I was some mad, but it couldn't be helped, an' Mr. Abram Grout's letter is still down there."

"What! you did not pry off the oyster and bring it up?"

"Didn't have anything to pry with at the time. And they bein' gone, what was the use?"

"But, man alive! the letter was evidently important."

"To *them*—sure. But it warn't wuth chasin' that yacht for mebbe a five-dollar note."

"And it might be worth a good many five-dollar notes to *us*," muttered Nick. "Well! can you remember how it read?"

"What's that? The letter?" asked the diver curiously.

"That is what I mean."

"Bless you, Mr. Carter, I read it at the time; but I didn't keep it in mind. It warn't nothing to me—*then*—you understand?"

"I see," said Nick.

"It can be read easy enough, though," added the diver.

"What! is it there yet?"

"Why, bless ye! it was there three days ago. Why not now?"

"You saw it again, then?"

"Saw it every time I went down till we run out of material and had to up-anchor and make for Baltimore."

"But that oyster is likely to open his shell again, or the action of the water will tear the paper away——"

"Say! d'yer want to see that letter *bad?*"

"I believe it might be of some value to Mr. Cameron and myself," replied Nick cautiously.

"Well, don't yer fret yer gizzard about it's gittin' tored away by the water. It's pretty quiet there, an' it's deep enough down for squalls not to agitate it. I reckon if you want to go down along o' me, we'll find it all right," said Ferret, winking.

"But won't the oyster let go?"

"If he opens his jaw," declared the diver, "the paper's likely stuck so firm that it'll still be there. It was heavy, thick paper I noticed when I sunk it. Nine chances to one, it'll be there."

"I declare! you encourage me to make a try for it, Mr. Ferret," said Nick, with a sigh. "We certainly are not getting ahead in our investigation very fast here. Well! that has nothing to do with it. If what you tell me bears any worthy fruit, Mr. Ferret, you won't lose by it. Meanwhile, keep your mouth shut."

"Betchu I will!" returned the diver. "I been warned by Mr. Cameron already."

"Ah!" exclaimed Nick, looking up as Chick entered. "All finished?"

"Yes, sir," said the other. "And here is the account of the *Spoondrift*, Mr. Carter."

The detective took the slip on which was jotted down the information he had asked for regarding the yacht in question.

"Here we have it, Mr. Ferret," he said coolly, as Chick departed. "'*Spoondrift*, schooner-yacht, 45 feet over all, steam and sail, built by Herishoff for Mandin & Pope, 1901. Owned by Ian Campbell, Baltimore, Md. Not in trade.' That tells me enough. Neither of those fellows owned her. We'll have to look up Ian Campbell. Perhaps there's another thread to the matter too," muttered Nick.

But old Ferret was staring at him with bulging eyes. He had even forgotten his cud, and his lower jaw fell open like a trap.

Nick paid no attention to his surprise, however. He picked up the other papers Chick had laid before him.

"See here. I suppose you are willing to sign this story you've told me, Mr. Ferret?" asked the detective, running his eyes over the neatly typewritten lines. "Listen here and see if my young men got it all taut and shipshape," and he read from the papers a brief and condensed account of what Ferret had related.

"Will you sign that, sir?" asked Nick, looking up for the first time to see the diver's amazed countenance.

"Holy heavers!" ejaculated Ferret at last. "What am I up against? How'd that feller git that down so slick?"

Ferret stared about the room.

"I swan! that gets my goat!" he pursued. "Have you got one o' them talkin'-merchines hid here that takes down everything a man says? By thunder! I'll be mighty careful what I say here in futur, an' no mistake!"

Nick laughed, but made no explanation.

"I reckon you are a man who isn't afraid to back up any statement he may make with his handwriting, eh?" he said, pushing the papers and the pen toward the diver. "You see, my method saves time, and when a man has no idea that he is talking for publication, you might say, he speaks much more freely. Right there, if you please. 'Amos Ferret'—thank you! Now, Mr. Ferret, when do you go back to Baltimore?"

"I calculate to go to-day."

"And when does your *Water Ferret* sail for Tangier Sound again?"

"Jest as soon as she is loaded. But we're waitin' for rock an' cement, and mebbe it'll be a week before we git back to Mr. Cameron's place."

"Tangier Sound is pretty nearly opposite the mouth of the Potomac River?" said Nick reflectively.

"That's right."

"Well, then, as I have business farther south than Baltimore, I won't go down with you on the *Water Ferret;* but I'll reach your landing about as soon as you do. Is that understood? If you should get there first make sure to save that precious oyster and the paper. Nobody else knows where it is?"

"That they don't."

"Not even your partner?"

"Bill? Huh! I'd never speak to Bill about nothin'. If Bill met a rat-tailed mermaid with green hair and a polka-dot complexion, when he was down under the water, he'd only stop drinkin' booze for a few days and say nothin' erbout it. Bill is what ye might call close-mouthed. He's so stingy with the English language that you'd think he owned it and was afraid that if he used any he'd wear it out! No, Mr. Carter, I ain't said a thing about this to a soul 'ceptin' you and Mr. Cameron."

"All right, Mr. Ferret!" exclaimed Nick, rising to shake hands with the diver, as Joseph appeared. "Good luck to you on the return voyage. And we hope Mr. Oyster won't let go his hold while he's waiting for us."

CHAPTER V.

IAN CAMPBELL.

When Joseph had taken Amos Ferret away, Nick paced his office for a few moments in deep thought. The strange story told by the diver had suggested a possible bit of evidence that might aid in the overthrow of the Blaney & Lowell Co. Of course, the letter might not prove of worth, after all; but seeing that Grout and his companion, whom Nick was sure was Paul Shade, had quarreled over it, the paper was likely to turn out of the highest importance.

Although Abe Grout's money was known to be back of the brokerage concern, nobody ever saw him enter their Wall Street offices. It was said that he never met any of the officials of the firm but Shade, and that their conferences took place away from New York.

This letter which had caused a momentary quarrel between the two men must be of particular importance. It must in some way connect Abe Grout with the crooked dealings of the firm.

"And if it should show how the scoundrels manage to obtain their advance information regarding government plans and court decisions, I'd have them all by the hair. That is what Mr. Cameron wants," thought Nick. "Information which will enable the stock exchange to keep the members of the firm off the floor, and force them to give up their cloak of business decency.

"Abe Grout has been a horse-owner, a book-maker, a betting-ring habitué, a pool-room king, a policy-player. He has made his money in a lot of dirty ways. If he publicly appeared connected with any decent business, he'd queer it at once. He knows that.

"But who is this Ian Campbell whose yacht he and Shade were using? The name somehow sounds familiar to my ear. Is he crooked, or merely has he

picked his friends, in this case, without much judgment?

"'Ian Campbell'—let me see. If he owns a yacht like this *Spoondrift*, he must have a million, and if he's got a million, it's dollars to doughnuts that he's done something to get his name on my roster," and Nick shrugged his shoulders as he stopped before the tall cabinets where he kept his "card-catalogue of celebrities."

He opened the drawer marked "C to Crass," and ran over the first row of cards. There were a dozen Campbells, and no more. One of them had been a murderer and was even now in Joliet; another was of the first-class of bank-burglars, and had half a dozen alises; most of the Campbells, coming as they did from Scotland, were a "canny lot," and had never got caught, at least, at any evil-doing!

Here was the man he sought. And it was true; he *had* done something out of the ordinary.

"Humph! Thought I must have heard the name before. Tried to equal the feats of the famous Walker on the Isthmus, did he? A plucky lad—and reckless—and perhaps with just the moral slant that would rope him into queer games with people like Shade and Grout. Well!"

While he muttered these comments he was reading the card in question:

"Campbell, Ian, 3d of that name, iron-forgers in Scot. & Pittsburg. 1st Ian coming to P. in '44. Ian 2d sold out to Carnegie in the 80's; 7 million invested in timber and coal lds. Other sources. Ian 3d, Princeton, '97; Edn. U., '99; tk. prize in Grk. Games, Athens, '98. Svd. 3 mos. Cuba in Spn. War; fitted filibuster expedition for Honduran rebels in '03; Col. in rebel army; capt'd and reported shot; saved by Spn. girl and smuggled home wounded. Figure in Baltimore society. Bachelor."

"I declare!" added Nick, having read these brevities twice over, "I can admire the fellow on one point at least. He seems to be the one modern 'soldier of fortune' who *didn't* marry the girl who saved his life. Still a bachelor—ha!"

For the words had brought a sudden thought—something that suggested a new line of inquiry regarding the case in hand—into the detective's mind. He put the card into its place, shut the drawer, and walked briskly down the room.

It was a long apartment, and there was but one door to it—that into the hall. At least so it appeared to the casual visitor. The more thoughtful person might remark upon the fact, wondering why there was not some means of entering the room in the front of the house on this floor without passing out through the hall. There seemed no break in the end wall, saving for the picture of the Greek girl before mentioned. This hung close to the wall—might have been screwed into place, in fact; but as it was only a comparatively small picture, it was not large enough to mask a door.

The wall-paper of the room was patterned on a large figure in dull brown on a green background. It was not a wall-paper that would easily hide any push-spring, or button, or other trick arrangement whereby a hidden door could be manipulated.

The detective approached the side of the room next the hall and turned the cock of a gas-bracket which protruded from the wall at that point. The room was lighted from an electric chandelier overhead and a standard lamp upon Nick's work-table; it looked as though these brackets—of which there were three about the room—had merely been put in for auxiliary lights—to use if anything happened to the electric current.

Turning the cock, however, did not bring a rush of gas through the burner. Instead, a part of the end wall rolled noiselessly back, from floor to ceiling, leaving an aperture of sufficient width to pass for a doorway, into a space behind. In fact, what was apparently the wall was nothing but an ingeniously arranged screen, made to look like the real wall of the room, but it cut off four feet of the room proper and masked the door into the apartment behind.

The fake wall was made of silk, printed in the same pattern as the wall-paper of the room. It was finished with an opaque back so that light could not shine through it, and it rolled back when the mechanical release, governed in the room proper by the gas-bracket cock, was turned.

In the space behind this screen could sit Nick's assistants, or anybody he wished placed there for private reasons, and all that went on in the office could be overheard by those thus concealed. A signal from Nick, understood by Chick, had set that nimble young man's fingers to flying over his note-book when Amos Ferret had begun the important part of his story. After taking it down, Chick had gone into the other room, closed the door, and translated his notes into the typewritten statement that the mystified diver had signed, while Patsy looked up the facts regarding the *Spoondrift*.

"Is Patsy there?" asked Nick, as the screen rolled back to admit him into the inner sanctum.

"At your service, Mr. Carter," replied the young Irishman, looking up from the book he was reading. He had taken Chick's place behind the screen when the other had gone in to the typewriter.

"At last, Patsy," said Nick, quietly sitting down, but first rolling the screen-wall into place, "there seems to be a ray of sunlight through the clouds that have shrouded this Blaney-Lowell case."

"Chick said this sailor chap brought some information," remarked Patsy.

"Nothing which gives us any further evidence. But it suggests possibilities. And that in more ways than one. If Ferret's story is true, and that oyster doesn't lose his grip on Abe Grout's letter," said Nick, smiling, "I'll have a look at it. But there is another idea rattling around in my brain-pan like a pea in a whistle."

"What's that, sir?"

"Those fellows were using a yacht belonging to Ian Campbell, of Baltimore. Know him?"

"Campbell? In the war, wasn't he? Rough Rider, or something? And didn't he cut up a shindy in South America, or somewhere, and get run out of the country?"

"Your memory for such scrappers as Mr. Campbell is evidently better than my own," chuckled Nick.

"My mind naturally soaks up information about such folk," remarked Patsy modestly. "I used to know the name, weight, and number of fights of every prize-ring hero since Sullivan licked Pug Wilson. But I'm going in for the high-brow life now—Adelina says I must—so I suppose I'll forget it all."

But Nick did not listen to this last statement of his young assistant, although the smile still lingered on his lips.

"It has been my observation," he said slowly, "that a fellow like this Ian Campbell is likely to fall to a woman's fascinations very easily."

"Hello!" exclaimed Patsy. "There *was* something about that Campbell and a Spanish señorita."

"Was there?"

"Fact, by jove! She was the one who helped him get away from that little rebellion he stirred up. And her folks sent her to a convent afterward. That's right."

"And that is why he is still a bachelor, you think?"

"Maybe."

"Four years ago—or five. A long time for a well set-up young fellow—and in Baltimore society, too—to remain 'true to Poll,' eh?"

Patsy grinned appreciatively.

"Baltimore *is* running Pittsburg pretty close for first place in that line, it's a fact," he admitted. "And doesn't this Campbell originally come from the Smoky City? At least, some of his dough comes from there."

"Quite right," said Nick. "But what is puzzling me is where the connection between Campbell and either Shade, or Abe Grout, comes in. Why! they're not in the same class with the ex-soldier of fortune."

"That Shade cuts something of a swath in Washington, didn't we find out?" queried Patsy ruminatively.

"Among men—yes."

"Well, this Campbell seems to be a good imitation of one."

"He's not in politics, I take it. If he has met Shade socially there must be women concerned. Now, Shade has no wife or daughter——"

"I have it!" exclaimed Patsy, shutting his book with a bang. "Didn't I tell you about the pippin that Shade carts around with him?"

"Ah! I *thought* there was something about a girl connected with Paul G. Shade."

"And you bet she's a dandy! She is as sweet a little thing as I've cast my peepers on in many a long day —of course, this is between you and I, Mr. Carter," added Patsy, with a grin and wink.

"Who is she?"

"He calls her his secretary."

"Well?"

"Oh, I went deeper, sir. But I didn't report on her, because she is straight goods. She's his sure-enough niece—orphaned daughter of his sister. And it seems Shade is a very decent fellow indeed in his own family circle. He was good to his sister and her husband, supported them pretty near, and educated this girl, whose name—now let me see," and Patsy brought forth his note-book and ran over certain entries.

A note-book is a very handy thing to have. One's memory cannot be trusted to be exact on all occasions. But Nick had always warned his assistants regarding the inadvisability of trusting anything of importance to black and white memoranda. *One never knows who might get hold of the writing!*

Patsy's notes defied analysis, however. It was rather a thick little book, with each page numbered. Each case on which Patsy worked was designated by an arbitrary sign which only he, himself, knew. And the remarks he jotted down about it were interspersed seemingly with the ordinary reminders of engagements, things to buy, measurements for various things, etc.

For instance, he ran down the list of items regarding this Blaney & Lowell case until he found this item:

Parlor shades: 38x3½
36x3¼
Lora 42.

Now, the memorandum looked like the merest housekeeping trifle. But as the sign meaning the Blaney-Lowell case stood before it, Patsy knew it was important. That it dealt with Shade was easy to guess. The girl's name and number following it showed that on page 42 there was something regarding a person connected with Shade, named Lora.

And when Patsy had turned up the page designated he found a paragraph begun by the same arbitrary sign, which read as follows:

"Price secretary—in golden oak, or mahog.—5 ft. 4.-67."

"Just so!" exclaimed Patsy, with confidence. "That's her name—Lora Price, and she acts as Shade's secretary. She's a brunette, and about five feet four inches tall, and let's see what page sixty-seven has to tell us?" and he flipped the leaves of his note-book rapidly.

There appeared once more the sign denoting business connected with the case in question, and Patsy read aloud:

"'L. won 2d. prize typewriting contest Md. Sq. Gdn. '06, —— machine.'

"That's it. She's a ripping good typewriter. I re-

member, now," said Patsy, closing his book. "And as I say, a mighty pretty, sweet little woman."

"That's an ingenious book you have there, Patsy," said Nick, smiling. "And this girl is with Paul G. Shade most of the time?"

"Pretty near all the time. I believe he has apartments in some Washington hotel the year round, and she presides there. I reckon that half these wealthy folks who associate with Shade do so because of Lora Price. I tell you, *she's worth it!*"

"And he trades on her good looks and decency, I suppose?"

Nick spoke more to himself than to Patsy, and the latter made no comment. Finally the chief arose and passed back into his office.

He touched the bell that summoned Joseph.

"Pack my bag. I am going to Washington to the Blank Hotel. Send the bag there. I'll be several days on the road, perhaps."

"Yes, sir. Shall I attend you, sir?" said the faithful Joseph.

"Hardly. This is an occasion where a valet would be somewhat out of place, my dear Joseph. Be sure you put an evening suit in my kit and a dress shirt."

Joseph went directly to obey these commands. Nick called his assistants together, made his assignments, arranged for them to communicate with him if there was need, and an hour later quitted the house.

That evening there appeared in Baltimore, knocking about the City Dock, and Thames and Philpot Streets, a seafaring man who would have been hailed even by an old sea-dog like Amos Ferret as "brother!" In this disguise Nick Carter had spent nearly three days on the Baltimore water-front before going on to Washington where, after discarding his masquerade, we have seen that he appeared at the hotel in his own proper person.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MAN IN THE INVERNESS.

The events of Nick's first evening in Washington, as already related, were vividly impressed on his memory as he walked slowly back to his hotel. The president's call for him, his interview with the chief executive of the nation, and the side-light that had been given him upon the Blaney, Lowell & Co. business, were not forgotten. Yet his principal ruminations as he walked were regarding the queer couple whom he had seen at the president's reception.

The little incident as the old lady had tripped on the steps, and her escort had caught her, made an impression on Nick Carter that he could not shake off. He was sure that they were not at all what they appeared to be—an aged couple from some country place, on a visit to the city.

He had seen nothing in the woman's look, manner, or mode of dressing to jar with the masquerade; but the man had not so successfully hidden his youth. The high color of his face was assumed, Nick was sure; and his tottering step was put on. When the woman had come so near falling, he had been as quick as a cat to seize her, and his strength in bearing her up showed that he was a much younger man than by his get-up one would believe.

"And he seemed to have a good deal of interest in *me* when that black abomination back in the hotel came yelling my name through the office," muttered Nick. "Was that idle curiosity—or something more?"

The query seemed to be unanswerable just at this time. But whether or no the stranger had any particular interest in the detective, or not, the latter was more than a little curious about *him*—and about his charming companion.

The detective never took unnecessary risks, however. The mere fact of the man in masquerade paying him more than common attention had caused Nick to be careful what carriage he took to the White House. And the appearance of the man and his female companion at that reception added to Nick's caution.

He had refused to take any carriage away from the place. He walked, and he was careful to keep on well-lighted thoroughfares and usually near people walking in the same direction as himself.

Experience had long since taught Nick Carter that the greed for money is the strongest incentive to crime that the world has seen. He had been recognized in Washington, although he had appeared in his proper person at the hotel less than three hours before. The secret service men had known of his coming, and possibly others had found it out, too. It was not certain that he was not being watched by the very people whose private affairs he had been engaged to investigate. And knowing what he did of Abe Grout and Shade, he was sure that if either, or both, of those men considered him in their way, they would do their best to wipe him off the slate!

He had no idea who the man in masquerade was—or his woman companion. He might make a guess, but Nick Carter was not given to idle fancies. The couple might have no interest for him whatsoever.

Yet he did not enter his hotel without a sharp glance around to see if they had returned to the same hostelry. The wide corridor was almost empty, however, for the theater crowds had not yet come in. As he stood a moment by the outer door, glancing up and down the rows of seats, a person entered suddenly behind him and well-nigh ran Nick down. He caught himself, indeed, only by seizing Nick's elbows from behind for just a moment.

"I'm sure I beg your pardon, sir!" exclaimed a full, rather pleasant voice, and Nick turned, smilingly, to look at the speaker and murmur a polite word.

He found before him a muscular, breezy-looking fellow, under thirty, black eyes, hair, and brows, clean-shaven like himself, and with a jaw as square as the end of a box. A pugnacious jaw, in fact,

which on a man of a different order and type would have looked fairly brutal.

But the black eyes were laughing and the lips smiled disarmingly as Nick looked into his face.

"I must have been traveling over fast," said the newcomer. "Did I jar you?"

"Not at all," replied the detective, quite as frankly.

Perhaps his opinion of the young man's appearance shone in his face and entered into the tone of his voice. At least, the latter smiled again and made another observation:

"I'm here before folks have got out of the theater, I reckon?"

"I believe you are. I've just come in myself, but I fancy it is early yet."

His new acquaintance was casting a roving eye over the benches in the long corridor, too. Nick gazed interestedly on his well-knit figure, broad shoulders, and the turn of his handsome head.

He seemed to be in evening dress and wore an Inverness coat. In a moment he turned back to Nick, quite willing to talk.

"Don't see 'em. Well! I believe they are here—or will show up yet. Friends, you know, and I was in once earlier and heard they had gone somewhere to the theater."

"Yes?" queried Nick lightly.

"And, by Jove! I made a round of the shows, too. Couldn't see hide nor hair of them."

He smiled again and looked beyond Nick. The latter saw his face suddenly change—a puzzled squint came into the eyes, and he frowned.

"Hel-lo!" the stranger muttered.

Nick knew that he saw somebody at *his* back, but he did not fancy turning to stare, too.

In a flash, however, the fellow's face cleared and he smiled again. Then, seeming to think that something in the line of explanation was due to Nick, he said:

"Take a squint at that old couple. Do you know them?"

The detective felt a tightening about his heart at the words; but he swung around to look.

It *was* the pair he had been so deeply interested in. Was all this a "cooked-up job"? He glanced sideways at his companion, but saw nothing but the disarming smile on his face.

"By Jove!" he was murmuring in Nick's ear. "Do you know, when that couple came out of the restaurant I thought for sure the old lady—— Well! I thought she was a good deal younger, you see," and he laughed in rather an embarrassed way.

"I must be seeing things to-night, that's sure. I saw her back, too, and I came near going over and speaking to her. Looks just like—well, she reminded me strongly at that moment of a lady in the party I had come here to-night to see. I didn't notice the dress, and the age, you see. What odd tricks a man's eyes will play him at times?"

"Quite right," returned Nick briefly, watching the couple himself with seemingly careless attention. They were going toward the elevators, she hanging to his arm and chattering as before.

"I've noticed them before," said Nick calmly. "I was up to the president's reception to-night, and they were there. Doing the town, I should say, in the remembrance of their honeymoon, maybe."

"Now, that's fine!" ejaculated the young man. "Nice-looking old codger, too—and she's as sweet as a silver-framed daguerreotype."

Nick smiled at his enthusiasm, and the fellow laughed himself.

"Well," he said, with that polite ease which shows the man of the world and one used to good society, "I'll beg your pardon again for running you down, and cut along. I'll get a table reserved before the crowd gets in. Ever so glad to have met you!"

"Now, I wonder if you *are?*" thought Nick, as the other bustled away. He stood where he was until the portières of the dining-room fell behind the broad back of the man in the Inverness.

"Was that a 'stall'—or am I getting fanciful again?" queried Nick thoughtfully. "And who *is* he?"

But it was to inquire about entirely different people that Nick sauntered up to the desk a moment later, and questioned the clerk.

"Who are the old couple of the vintage of '68, Dickson?" he asked.

"Oh-ho! you've noticed 'em, have you, Mr. Carter?" queried the clerk, smiling. "Queer old ducks, aren't they?"

"That is not answering my question."

"Shows I was Yankee bred," was the reply. "Well, they come from northern New York, I believe—somewhere up Utica way. Isn't she a cream-drop of an old lady? Looks good to see folks like that, who have made the running so many years together without the divorce court—heh? They register as Mr. and Mrs. William Furtz. Know the name?"

"No."

"He let me have it in confidence that he brought her here for a sightseeing trip more than thirty years ago, and that they stopped at a hotel that used to stand on this very site. I asked 'em where in the hotel their rooms were at that time, and he told me—overlooking the side street. I have the plan of the old hotel right here, and I fixed it so as to give 'em a suite just about where they must have slept before. Tickled him most to death!"

"I see," said Nick. "You clerks can do anything. I suppose you put somebody else out for the nonce?"

"No. But I got an old patron to give up one of his rooms for the few days they're to be here. Didn't bother him any, and gave the old couple a world of pleasure."

Nick nodded and strolled back toward the elevators on his way to his own room which consisted of one large sleeping-apartment and bath on one of the upper floors. He had got into one of the cars and was being

shot heavenward before another thought struck him. The clerk was no longer here to answer his question, but the grinning black boy who ran the elevator, was.

"Where are Mr. and Mrs. Furtz's rooms, Snowball?"

"Dey's on de fust flaw, sah."

"Which side?"

"Ovah on de street side, sah."

"Who's next to 'em, do you know?"

"Mist' Pollen, sah."

"So *he* gave up one of his rooms to them, did he?"

"Huh?" said the darky, rolling his orbs. "Oh, no, sah. Dat was Mist' Shade, sah. Berry nice man, Mist' Shade—an' his purty niece, Miss Lora. Dey's on de odder side of Mist' Furtz."

Nick Carter merely smiled. He got out at his floor and walked calmly toward his own room.

"Now, I might have known that," he murmured. "Of course, it would be Mr. Shade who gave up one of his rooms to please the old couple from the turnip district! Mr. Paul G. Shade without doubt. And, ass that I am!" continued Nick, with emphasis, as he let himself in and shut the door, "I didn't even know that Shade had his Washington apartments in this hotel! I'll give Patsy a wigging for *that* oversight."

CHAPTER VII.

HOW NICK "FELL TO IT."

These discoveries and suspicions might have been dovetailed together into a very plausable explanation, had Nick Carter so wished. Instead of turning in at a decent hour and getting the sleep he needed—he had had little since leaving New York four days before—he could have continued his chase of the will-o'-the-wisp that might connect these several incidents with the Blaney-Lowell affair.

He might have gone down-stairs again and watched to see if the friends of the young man in the Inverness had really appeared in the restaurant. He might have endeavored to find out something concerning the young man himself—his identity, where he hailed from, and who his friends really were.

And if those friends had appeared, he might have learned if, by chance, they included Mr. Paul G. Shade and his niece and secretary, Lora Price. Above all he might have attempted in some way to learn if the said Mr. Shade and his young companion had not been masquerading in habiliments of another day and age, and if they were not, in fact, the veritable old couple from upper York State to whom Mr. Shade had relinquished one of the rooms of his large suite.

These were all very pretty theories; but they did not appeal to Nick Carter, even if true in every particular, as germaine to the case on which he was at work.

Surely Shade and his niece could not have masqueraded for *his* sake. It wasn't done to watch *him*, that was sure. And Nick, although he might have some suspicion as to who the young man in the Inverness was, felt willing to wait a while before putting his suspicions to the test.

First of all Nick desired to make certain inquiries regarding Shade, and his methods in Washington, and then to meet Amos Ferret, the diver, at Mark Cameron's place on the shore of Tangier Sound.

Tired Nature demanded, too, that she be satisfied. Result: Nick Carter went to bed, refused to think of these troublesome matters longer, and arose refreshed at seven the next morning, perhaps having lost some important information that he might have otherwise gained, but better able in body and spirit to cope with the work of the day, whatever it might be.

In his bath Nick heard a rap on the door and halloaed to know who had called him.

"It jes' me, sah! Yo' hawse done come, sah, an' de groom sent me up ter tell you," was the black bell-hop's cry through the keyhole.

Nick came out of the tub with a bound.

"What's that you say?" he demanded.

The boy repeated the tale almost verbatim.

"Not me, Blackie! It isn't *my* horse. It's not for me."

"Yes, it is, sah."

"Why, I did not order a horse. What kind of a horse?"

"A ridin'-hawse, sah. An' it suah is fer you, sah."

"Nonsense!"

"De groom said Mist' Nich-o-las Carter, sah."

"He did, heh?"

"An' he's Mist' Pyle's groom——"

"*What!*" roared Nick. "Mr. Pyle?"

"Yes, sah."

"Mr. Reginald Pyle?"

"Yes, sah."

"Well, I declare! That's handsome of Reggie. Who'd have thought it?" exclaimed the detective, and hurried into his clothes.

It was just the morning for a canter, and Nick knew what the bridle-paths were about Washington. Out Gebrgetown way, and beyond, are the most beautiful roads for horseback exercise in the country; and many Washingtonians ride—notably the president and his own staff of friends and assistants.

That Mr. Pyle, despite his dryness and the fishy quality of his handshake, should have warmed up enough to offer Nick a mount did not so surprise the New Yorker. Pyle probably knew that the detective was a devotee of that form of exercise at home, and the act was a very gracious one, indeed.

And when he had come down to the side door of the hotel and found the groom holding the horse Nick was doubly delighted. It was a splendid Kentucky-bred mare with the delicate, pointed ears and tapering legs of her tribe—the mettlesome racer that has not been bred down to a mere running machine, all legs and neck!

The fact that he was not altogether dressed for riding did not interfere with Nick's pleasurable anticipation. The groom, seeing his plight, took off his own leggings and offered them, as he said:

"You suah won't need no spurs with dat filly, sah. She's jes' like er lam'—only sperited. Here's yo' whip, sah. Wait till I buckle dat odder legging, sah. Tank yo', sah! Let 'er go!"

The mare needed no urging. As she started Nick was aware of a big motor-car turning the corner; and at the noise of it the mare snorted and ran. She seemed to consider that the car thundering behind was a matter of personal insult to her. She did her best to get away from it!

Nick was used to riding spunky horses, however, and he was by no means sorry that the mare kept up a keen gait. The rush of air past him as they went on was delightful. He could have sung aloud.

Only that car—or some other—kept almost continually at his heels. There seemed to be a good many cars out on this morning, and the mare did not like them. When she met one, head on, she did her best to jump the ditch, or climb the hedge or fence.

Nick certainly worked his passage with that mare. And when some car would come up behind and toot, the little beast would try to bolt every time. As these tooting cars selom passed, the detective began to wonder if it was the same automobile each time.

He was usually too busy with the mare to look around on those interesting occasions, so he had no means of telling; but after an hour's ride into the country—and rather a lonesome country he found it in the direction he went—he decided to return to town.

He came about and started home. Within half a mile, at the junction of a cross-road, the mare spied another auto-car in the way!

"If you were my beast, I'd break you of this foolishness very soon, my lady!" muttered the rider, tempted to lay on the whip. "I wonder what Pyle could be thinking of, to send me such a creature to ride over these motor-infested roads."

There was no answer to this. And when he began to force the mare nearer, he found that the car was stopped and the motor quiet. It was where the road was hedged high on either side with a close screen and there was absolutely no habitation in sight but a dilapidated negro cabin. And to the amazement of the detective the only person in the car was a young girl! She sat in front and had evidently been driving the vehicle herself. But she was not driving it now, and that fact seemed to cause her a great deal of anxiety.

As Nick approached, she was fiddling with first one lever, and then another, and talking, seemingly, to the machine:

"Oh, dear! why *won't* you go? You just *must* go – that's all there is to it! What *is* the matter with you? I never saw such an obstinate, mean, cross old things there! I wish——"

Just then the mare snorted and she looked up to see the frightened animal and the curious rider, both with eyes fixed on her and her machine.

"Oh, sir! can you make it go?" cried the girl.

Then, evidently ashamed of her own impulsiveness, she blushed deeply and pulled down her veil to hide her pretty face.

"I beg your pardon, sir! And your horse acts so badly, too. But I am in really *dreadful* trouble."

"What seems to be the matter?" demanded Nick Carter, restraining the mare with difficulty.

"I *must* get on. I'm quite five miles from home now, and they expected me back an hour ago. I only ran in with my uncle to the station to catch the train and was coming right back. They always say I'm doing foolhardy things; but our chauffeur had been up all night with a toothache, and the poor fellow wasn't fit to go—and—and uncle *had* to catch that train—and—and there didn't seem to be anybody else to go."

"Well," returned Nick, already out of the saddle and tying the mare to a sapling in the hedge, "that certainly is an almost breathless lot of trouble. Let us see what the matter is."

"I can't tell you how obliged I am!" declared the girl.

"Don't thank me until we see whether I can be of any use to you or not—— Whoa there!"

The mare had started, drawn back from her hitching-post, and snorted.

"Your horse is mettlesome, sir," said the girl.

"She's bothersome, all right," grunted Nick, and leaned over to try the lever.

As he did so he found the hand of the young lady directly under his eye. It was a soft, white, slender hand, but he immediately noted the shape of the ends of the fingers. They were not tapering as the rest of the hand would suggest, but a trifle blunt and seemed almost flattened at the very tips.

Especially was this true of the first three fingers. Nick, who was a student of hands as well as of faces, could not fail to bring his reasoning faculties to bear on this oddity. She must have, for some time, used the tips of her fingers in some certain manual labor. What?

"Ha! a typist," thought the detective. "And, although she's young, she must be expert and has pounded the keys a great deal."

With this thought came another. He suddenly remembered what Patsy had said about the pretty niece of Paul G. Shade—Miss Price. She was a prize typist—was a "wonder," Patsy had said.

The detective's suspicions were instantly aroused. He glanced up sideways into the girl's face, under her veil. The wind was blowing this shrouding, filmy web aside, and he saw her countenance plainly.

She was a brunette, and very beautiful indeed. And from the momentary glance he obtained Nick believed she had some of the features of the "sick lady" who had attracted so much of his attention on the previous evening.

"Is this Lora Price?" thought Nick. "If so, what's the game? Where is Shade—or is the young chap I met last night to be in this game? Surely, if he is whom I half-suspect him to be, he'll not be up to anything so openly rusty—even for a girl?"

At the instant the mare snorted again, sprang back from the hedge, and, breaking her strap, darted down the road like the wind! Nick sprang to catch her, but he stumbled as he crossed the road and was too late!

"Oh, sir! your horse has got away!" cried the girl.

Nick turned and looked at her quizzically. Then he glanced back at the hedge and shrugged his shoulders.

"Do you know?" he said, "I'm almost willing to swear that if I should go near enough to see, I should find that strap was cut through with a knife!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A REAL RUNAWAY.

The girl stood up in the auto and Nick looked to see what she would do. He knew he was in a trap—that somebody was behind that hedge and had cut his horse loose; but he did not know which person was the more dangerous to him, the girl or the Unknown.

At least, the girl was nearer. She might be armed, and because he was going riding and expected to be jounced about a bit, Nick had left his guns in his traveling-bag in the hotel.

"Now!" cried the girl.

"Very well," responded the detective. "If *you* say so!"

It wasn't particularly chivalrous, and she certainly *was* a pretty girl; but the emergency was great and the detective could not afford to fall into the enemy's hands at this juncture—especially as he was not at all sure just who the enemy was!

He made a flying leap for the front seat of the auto. If the girl had had a gun his movements were so lightninglike that she could scarcely have gotten the weapon out and used it!

As he landed on the step he reached out and seized her. She was light, and he raised her easily in one hand, gripping her loose coat and other clothing at the waist. With a swist and a screech of surprise, he flung her backward over the seat-back, and she landed ungracefully, but easily, on the cushions in the tonneau!

Nick whirled instantly to seize the wheel and lever. He did not believe there was a thing the matter with the mechanism, and if the shut-off had been worked right he could still start it without "cranking up." It was a possibility, and Nick had risked the trial. If the spark was alive——"

And it was; with a grunt and shake the mechanism began to pound. The throbs became more regular. He cautiously opened her up. The big auto plunged ahead.

And at that instant, when success seemed all but in his grasp, and he was about to fly, taking the girl as a prisoner, and giving the tricksters the laugh, there was a shout from behind. Nick did not turn, but he heard the hiss of something sweeping through the air. He could not dodge; he was unable to change his position and still retain control of the automobile.

But he gave her more power. She bounded ahead, and just then a noose settled over the head and shoulders of the detective, tightened around his body and upper arms, and as the car shot on, he was literally "snatched" over the back of the seat and out upon the hard road!

It was a bad fall, and for some moments he was helpless from the shock. His arms were in a vise, and he had landed with such force on his spine that a numb sensation extended the entire length of his back.

But he struggled to a sitting posture in a moment, and saw the auto plowing erratically down the road. His first thought was really for the danger which the girl was in!

But then he saw her spring lightly over into the front seat again, and, in a flash, the big machine stopped. She had gained control almost instantly.

Nick, however, found himself able to control nothing at all—saving his tongue! He was yanked flat on his back once more, and then a big man in a long auto-coat and goggles stood over him.

"It's him, all right!" this fellow turned to shout to the girl in the machine. "Come on back."

Nick studied him through his half-closed lids. He gave little sign himself of recovering from the shock and fall. He judged that it might be just as well to appear helpless.

If this big fellow could throw a rope in the way he did, and handle a heavy man like Nick himself, the latter considered that, as he was practically helpless, an appearance of partial insensibility would be his safest course.

"Come back here, Lora!" shouted the man again, and removed his cap and goggles, which had effectually masked him.

It was Shade. And it was the man Nick had seen the night before who posed as "Mr. William Furtz." There could be no doubt of it. Although his well-fitting white wig was gone, and his complexion was rather sallow instead of ruddy, there was no mistaking these particulars.

The Wall Street man's boldness in thus removing any attempt at disguise boded ill for Nick, and the detective knew it. It did not seem possible that he would plot or attempt to injure Nick when this pretty young girl knew all about it, and was present and active in his capture; yet looks are sometimes deceitful, and, perhaps, Miss Lora Price did not understand who Nick was, nor what her uncle proposed to do with him.

And Nick would have given considerable to know this himself! He did not know whether to put up a

fight the first chance he got, or to await developments.

Certain it was that Shade had been none too easy with him thus far. Of course, Nick himself had not treated the broker's niece with any great tenderness or courtesy. But when he was yanked out of the automobile, his neck might have been broken!

And if this was the automobile that had several times this morning stolen up behind his spirited mare and scared her, it was plain that the occupants of the machine—of course, Shade and the girl—had not cared much whether Nick was thrown and killed.

These facts were pretty plain, and the detective, even if he *did* feel somewhat stunned, saw another point, too. That mare had never been sent around to his hotel by Mr. Pyle, the president's secretary. Not much!

"By Jove! I'm a gullible person, that's a fact!" thought the angry Nick. "She was an unbroken mare—at least, unfamiliar with the city and with automobiles—and this scoundrel here supplied her for the sweet purpose of having me flung and my neck broken. It would have looked like an accident and nobody been the wiser, saving the nigger whom they bribed to say he came from Pyle.

"Very well! I'm up against a man who will hesitate at little to carry his ends. I am known to be hunting him and his friends. They have had me watched. I must be, as the children say, 'very warm' on this hunt for the thimble!

"At least, they consider that I am near arriving at some conclusion or discovery, that is bound to hurt them. Am I? Well, if so, I have been unable yet to discover——

"Thunder! can it be that letter old Ferret told me of? Have they got onto it? Did Ferret talk, after all? And they are afraid of my getting it before *they* do, or before the action of the water will reduce the paper to pulp, or wash away the ink-marks?

"This is a puzzle—— Ha! the girl and the car."

She had turned the big auto around and now brought it chugging to the spot where Nick lay.

"Oh, uncle! is he seriously hurt? I'm afraid we were too rough?" she cried, seeing Nick's pale and dust-streaked face.

Shade grunted.

"It would be rather terrible to have the blood of even a contemptible spy and busy-body on one's conscience," said the girl, hopping out and bending above Nick. "What does he say?"

"Nothing—as yet," replied Shade, with a grim laugh. "I reckon he hasn't got his breath."

"Let me have your handkerchief, uncle," she said, and when he gave it to her with an indulgent laugh, she proceeded to wipe the detective's face.

"My! you're a sight!" she giggled.

This was too much for Nick himself, and he grinned feebly.

"I reckon he's coming to," said Shade. "Don't be too tender with him, Lora. Let me take another turn around him with this rope and then I'll get him into the machine before somebody comes along and gets curious."

While he spoke he tied Nick more securely, and then came behind him and lifted the detective to his feet. At the moment the quiet of the situation was rudely broken in upon by a distant tooting and the roar of an approaching car.

"Oh, uncle!" gasped the girl. "We'll be caught!"

"Not much we won't!" exclaimed Shade, and his motions filled Nick with a mixture of disgust and admiration.

Shade grabbed the handkerchief from Miss Price's hand, rolled it into a ball, and, forcing Nick's mouth open, thrust it between the detective's teeth as a gag. Another handkerchief whipped around the lower part of the prisoner's face served to keep the gag in place.

Nick was leg loose, but he was still dizzy, and Shade worked with marvelous despatch. He ripped off his own long, shapeless coat and flung it over Nick's shoulders. His goggles and cap otherwise masked the detective effectually. Then he hustled his prisoner into the tonneau, seized Nick's own hat from the roadway, and clapped it on his head, and crowded in beside the helpless man.

"Quick, Lora! start on," he cried. "If we are standing they'll slow up and ask what the matter is."

The girl was quite as nimble as he, and hardly had he spoken when the heavy machine began to chug, chug, chug again and they were moving. She took the side road, which evidently led down toward the Potomac. They were not out of sight of the main highway when the automobile that they had heard, swept by the cross-road.

"Good!" ejaculated Shade. "We might as well keep straight on. You know the way, Lora. I declare our friend looks as though he were really enjoying the ride," and he chuckled.

Bound and gagged as he was, Nick could do little but lie at ease in the tonneau of the car. To anybody who saw him it would seem that he was merely a passenger enjoying a spin in the big car.

Shade got down on his knees and tied the slack of the rope around Nick's legs below the knees. Then he sat up and smacked his hands together, with a hearty laugh.

"We certainly have Mr. Nick Carter where the hair is short. I think he will not trouble us until this business is finally settled and we are well out of the country."

"I am afraid we are breaking the law, uncle," she said, looking back for an instant over her shoulder.

Shade chuckled heartily.

"No! do you?" he asked.

"But he's nothing but a private detective, is he?"

"Nothing more, my dear. A regular tin-badger. They're as common as pebbles on a sea-beach. Only *this* one is uncommonly heartless and conscienceless."

"I really *would* be afraid if you hadn't told me that,

uncle," she responded. "But he has no right to interfere with our private business."

"None at all."

"And then, to try to injure me in Ian's eyes——"

"Sh! Let's postpone that for now," interrupted Shade, with a nervous glance sideways at his prisoner.

"Now, Lora, do you understand what you are to do?"

"Perfectly."

"No mistake?"

"Oh, trust me, uncle. I shall make no error."

"Then drop me at the station. I must be seen in the city within a short time, or this whole business may go wrong. All you've got to do when you get to the dock is to signal with the horn—four short toots and then a long one. The boys will be on hand, and I saw the yacht's skipper last night. Tickle that fellow's palm and he'll do almost anything."

"Oh, uncle!" she said, and Nick saw her shiver. "I hope this will come out all right."

"I hope you're not going to show the white feather, Lora," said Shade sternly.

"No-o! But——"

"Remember what this means to me!"

"I do, dear uncle. And to *me*, too. Oh, I am not unselfish about it, Uncle Paul," and she laughed a little brokenly. "And what's the odds? If we pull through, it will be all the same in a hundred years. What is wrong to-day is right to-morrow. It is only our attitude, our environment, or the slant of our minds that makes a thing seem either right, or wrong."

Nick Carter was amazed to hear such philosophy as this from a girl so young. What kind of bringing-up must she have had? How had she become tinged in her opinions and morals with such gravely wrong ideas? Pessimism and skepticism does not sound pleasant from young lips, especially such pretty lips as Lora Price's were.

Nick was personally in such pain and difficulty that he had little thought for this phase of the adventure now. He knew that Shade must be desperate, whether the girl was, or not. It looked to the detective as though Shade had such an influence over his niece that he had made her think this proceeding—this getting of the detective in their power, and even endangering his life and limb—was necessary, and, for some reason, not so very terrible a business.

There seemed to be some personal animus on the girl's part, too. Remembering what he had suspected regarding Ian Campbell, the owner of the yacht *Spoondrift*, and what he had learned during his stay in Baltimore regarding that wealthy young soldier of fortune, Nick was ready to believe that Lora Price was more than a little interested in the Baltimore society man.

The words let drop by both his captors, too, added to Nick's assurance that both Campbell and his yacht were being used by Shade for some illegal purpose.

"And as I reckon I'm likely to remain with the show a while longer," thought the triced-up detective, "I am likely to learn all the whys and wherefores of the matter before I get through."

The way Shade had tied him seemed to make escape impossible, anyway. Not without drawing attention to himself could Nick put forth any strength to try the bonds. He must be contented at present to sit up and act the part of a dummy—a helpless prisoner—until after Shade had left the car.

This occurred when they came in sight of the railway-station. The man would not let Lora run the car up to the platform, for a train was about due, and he evidently feared that somebody might notice the rather peculiar appearance of Nick in the tonneau.

"Keep moving," he advised his niece, as he hopped out. "The faster you go the less likelihood of anybody noticing what you've got here," and Shade appeared to be shaking hands with Nick, although he was really making sure that his bonds were taut.

"Don't fear for me, uncle!" she cried, and started the machine again.

"Luck go with you, my brave little girl!" he called out, under his breath.

The motor-car dashed off and, crossing the railroad-track, entered an even lonelier road than the one it had been following. There was timber on either hand, and it grew pretty close and thick bordering the road, which could scarcely be termed a "highway" at this point.

The car got through, however, and the girl evidently knew her way well. When she did see a cabin, or larger domicile, she put on speed and there was little likelihood of anybody noticing the peculiar figure Nick made in the tonneau.

She paid very little attention, for, the road being crooked and the way rough, she of necessity gave most of her mind to steering the car. It was a woodsy road, and from time to time the tree branches brushed the top of the car-back, or whipped against the varnished sides of the body.

A rabbit was startled from his breakfast beside the way and crossed the road, before the whirring machine in two frightened leaps, his cotton-tail whisking into the brush. A flock of quail ran from under the very wheels of the car.

They arrived at the summit of a long, apparently easy slope. Nick could not see far ahead, for there was a sharp turn; but one thing he *did* catch a momentary glimpse of. A long way ahead, and below them, sparkled the surface of the Potomac River.

The morning was still and cool and the air was astir in the tree-tops. The branches under which the motor-car whirred away swayed in this breeze. Had he not had so much trouble on his mind at just this moment, Nick might have been struck with the beauty of the day.

One noticeable thing he *did* see, however. Just at the sharp turn ahead was a branch hanging rather

low, apparently broken half off, and swinging like a pendulum. It was a peculiar-looking branch, and as the car rushed down upon the spot it seemed to grow longer—to become distended.

Nick saw that there were no twigs upon the branch, and that it seemed nearly as thick as a man's wrist for the three feet or more which was in sight. Back and forth it swung until the car was almost under it. And then—and not until then!—the detective realized what it was.

It was a good-sized blacksnake, and at the very moment he discovered this fact, his snakeship dropped squarely into the front seat of the swiftly traveling auto!

Either the jar of the passing car dislodged it, or it was at the precise point where it had to let go and drop. However, in either case, it *did* drop! And it landed on the seat close beside Lora Price, the fair chauffeur.

She had just made the turn and had seen the straighter track ahead. It was straighter, but it grew in steepness. She was about to brake the instant the curve was well rounded.

But the car was scarcely on its four wheels again when she glanced down and saw the blacksnake coiling swiftly beside her, its wicked head and gleaming eyes lifted two feet or more from the seat, its tongue playing in and out like forked lightning!

Lora Price was undoubtedly a brave and resourceful girl; otherwise Shade would not have trusted her alone with the prisoner on this strange journey.

But snakes had not been taken into account!

With a shriek which awoke the echoes, Miss Price dropped her hands from the wheel and the speed-lever, and fell back in her seat. It was a wonder she did not fall from the car itself, for she was helpless with fear!

On sped the car, bounding down the steeper descent, untrammeled by the brake, and with no hand at the wheel. The girl was totally unconscious, while in the tonneau lay the triced-up body of Nick Carter, who had been left absolutely helpless by Paul Shade.

This was a runaway, indeed, and it looked at the moment as though there could be but one end to it—wreck for the automobile and death or fatal injury to both of its occupants.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT THE SIGNAL BROUGHT.

The peril which menaced both the girl and Nick Carter was great, indeed. An unsteered motor-car, plunging down a steep hill, over a rough track like this, offered every chance in the world for a bad upset. Nor was the descent straight for very many rods!

But all the time which had elapsed since Paul Shade had left his pretty and plucky niece to drive their prisoner to the riverside, Nick himself had not been idle.

The road had been rough and crooked. Miss Price had been able to glance at Nick but seldom. And when she was not looking at him, the great detective was going through some of the most peculiar gyrations anybody but a contortionist ever made!

These activities were not caused by the jouncing of the car, although that was knocking him about considerably, too; but there was method in Nick's acrobatic feats.

He had been too stunned to put up any fight when Shade had tied him; nor did he think it advisable at that time to tempt the scoundrel to treat him more harshly than was necessary.

Undoubtedly his attitude had led Shade to believe that Nick was more seriously hurt than was the fact. As the detective seemed so helpless, the Wall Street man did not fear much that his prisoner would attempt to escape while Lora Price had him solely in charge.

Nick was not in the habit, however, of imitating Micawber, and waiting for something to turn up. He usually turned things up himself!

In this present case, it struck Nick that it would be an excellent idea to make at least an attempt to free himself of his bonds at once. They were not out of sight of the railway-station before he began straining on the cords, and swelling his muscles in different parts of his body to loosen or stretch the rope. A straightaway struggle to break the hemp, he knew, would be worse than useless.

There is but one way to lash a man securely, and be sure that he will not get free. This is with green, or wet thongs. When wet, hide-thongs will stretch; if they are put on the victim in this state, as they dry they are bound to hold him tighter and tighter—indeed, among certain tribes of savages, men are tortured to death in this way. A thong tied tight enough around the throat to be slightly uncomfortable when wet, will shrink to such an extent in drying that the victim will be most horribly and slowly choked to death!

But this was not hide that bound Nick Carter. It was plain, ordinary hemp, and the nature of hemp is entirely opposite to that of leather. Wet rope shrinks; dry rope stretches. This rope might not have been perfectly dry when Shade lashed Nick Carter; at least, the detective had been very successful in stretching his bonds during the last few minutes.

The knots with which Shade had fastened him were tighter than ever, but the writhing of his body was rapidly shifting the winding rope. It was being worked downward, and was already to his hips when Nick saw the blacksnake drop into the front seat of the auto.

Gagged as he was, Nick could give the girl no warning of her new seat-mate, even had he so desired. But when she screamed, and fainted, and the auto

began to run wild, the detective believed his own, as well as her, last hour had come!

Faster and faster the car was hurled down the hillside, and an obstruction at any moment might overturn it. The girl had come well-nigh to falling out of her seat. The snake was practically harmless; but it served its purpose, just the same. Miss Price had been frightened out of her senses. There could be no doubt of that!

And Nick saw well that disaster faced them. He could not cry out; and there were none to help. If a soul did aught to stop the terrible career of this runaway car, it must be the detective himself.

There was a turn just ahead! A boulder cropped out of the steep bank on one side. If they ever charged that boulder——

With a final wriggle Nick felt the ropes slip farther down. He wrenched free a hand—then another. There was no time to snatch off the handkerchief about his face, or to free his lower limbs.

The snake, finding the girl harmless, had uncoiled and slipped down into the bottom of the vehicle, evidently trying to escape from the jouncing car. But had it remained on the seat, it would have been all the same to Nick Carter. He actually dove over the back of the seat, and his hands grappled with the levers and the wheel.

He shut the speed off instantly, then he grabbed the steering-wheel with both hands, and, as they came to the corner, he gave the wheel the proper twirl!

The machine skidded across the road, and almost turned over. Nick, lying across the back of the seat, came near to being cast overboard as it was. But the wheels held to the dirt road, and amid a cloud of dust the car made the turn!

Fortunately there were a few rods of straight road here in which Nick could get his bearings. He kicked himself out of his remaining bonds, tore off the handkerchief and the gag, and lifting the insensible girl to one side, he slipped under the wheel and quickly brought the car to a stop.

Mr. Blacksnake had already left for parts unknown. Lora Price remained quite insensible. It seemed more than a faint—or, rather, more than an ordinary faint.

Under the circumstances the condition of the young woman rather pleased Nick. They were out of sight of any house and the detective got down to stretch his legs and to look over the shaken automobile. After the jouncing it had received it would not have surprised him if some of the parts had been shaken loose.

As far as he could see, however, after some minutes' examination, everything was all right. And still the girl remained unconscious.

Nick was not a heartless man by any manner of means; and although Lora Price was engaged with Shade in reprehensible practises, he would not have left her without care or attention if there seemed to be anything to do for her.

When he had lifted her into the other seat he had discovered that this was no common faint. He felt her pulse, her forehead, and raised the lid of her eye. She gave no sign of returning consciousness, nor did she display other symptoms that Nick knew usually went with a merely hysterical condition.

The shock of the snake falling into the car had affected Lora Price strangely. Some people have a deadly fear of cats; most folk detest snakes, spiders, and other forms of insect and reptilian life.

Lora Price seemed to have been flung into a sort of trance by the shock of the discovery of her strange seat-mate. There was no water in sight with which he might bathe her wrists and face; and if there were, even, he doubted if such mild treatment would be sufficient to bring the girl around.

Her heart-action was good and her pulse, although light, was regular. He could see that she was coming to no harm in her present condition, and as she was, her presence did not hamper him in the least. In fact, if she remained as she was, Nick determined upon a move that nobody without his bold heart would have contemplated!

Somewhere at the bottom of this hill they were on, lay the dock of which Shade had spoken. To this dock they were bound. Nick lifted Lora into the tonneau of the vehicle, adjusted Shade's coat, cap, and mask again, and getting under the wheel, started on.

The car whirled down the hill in a few minutes. As it proved, there *was* a dock there, at the head of a small, crooked inlet. The mouth of the inlet could not be seen from the dock, although Nick glimpsed a broad expanse of the Potomac through the trees. There was no house in sight, and this was evidently a dock not much used for any purpose. It was, indeed, rather dilapidated.

The side-hill was well wooded, for all Nick knew might mask some house, or plantation. He did not want to remain here inactive with the senseless girl. And the bold idea that had flashed into his mind the instant he was free and had command of the motor-car, seemed practicable.

Looking around at Lora, and seeing that she still lay so white and helpless, Nick was doubly urged to persevere in the course which seemed to open straight before him. He had brought the car to a stop at the dock, but had turned it half-around that it might be easy to put on speed again and escape over the route they had come if it were necessary.

Now he pressed the bulb of the automobile-horn, forcing from its muzzle four short blasts and then a lingering one that awoke the echoes of hill, and dale, and river!

There was, almost instantly, a reply to this signal from out beyond the turn in the creek. A single sharp blast of a steam-whistle was evidently the signal agreed upon by the men in Shade's confidence.

From what Shade had said to his niece in Nick's hearing, there must be a yacht waiting out there. Shade owned no yacht, that was sure; it was not hard to guess that the one he was using in this nefarious

business was the *Spoondrift*, belonging to Mr. Ian Campbell, the Baltimore society man.

Was Campbell in this game, too? Was he so much enamored of Lora Price that he was willing to lend his yacht and his influence to aid in Paul G. Shade's business? And did he know that his *Spoondrift* was to be used to carry off Nick Carter, that the tricksters might pull off another big deal without interference on the detective's part?

"Confound the young fool!" thought Nick. "His course since he graduated from college certainly has shown an overabundance of spirit and an unhealthy desire for scrapping. A game like this for a girl as a prize would doubtless appeal very strongly to Mr. Ian Campbell. Ha!"

A boat suddenly shot into view in the inlet, or creek. It was rapidly rowed toward the dock by four sailors in a spanking uniform, and a little light-haired chap, in the uniform of an officer, held the tiller-ropes. In the bow sat another figure in a long, dark coat—the one puzzling feature to Nick of the whole crew.

CHAPTER X.

A BOLD PLAY.

Nick gave Lora another close scrutiny as the yacht's long-boat came shooting up to the wharf. She did not move or show any sign of coming out of the strange sleep into which she had fallen.

The single doubt now in Nick's mind was regarding the figure in the bow of the boat. Who was he? What part had he in the game?

The light-haired officer in the stern looked up and saluted Nick when the boat drew near.

"Mr. Shade, is it?"

"Quite true," replied Nick gruffly. Shade's automobile-coat, cap, and goggles were an effectual disguise for him.

He saw the man in the bow prepare to come ashore and then Nick realized who it must be. The intention had been, for Lora to go aboard the yacht with their prisoner. The sailors were probably prepared to take anybody off who came with Lora, and ask no questions. This man in the long coat and cap was Shade's chauffeur!

Of course, somebody must look out for the machine—take it back to Washington, in fact. This was the man to do it!

Without worrying further, then, the detective set about boldly to follow the plan he had conceived when he got free of his bonds. He stepped back to the automobile and picked the girl up in his arms, walking with her to the edge of the dock just as the chauffeur sprang up.

"You have your instructions?" queried Nick, striving to copy Shade's voice as closely as possible.

"Thirfectly, monsieur," cried the Frenchman, bowing.

Nick grunted and turned his back on him.

"Hey, you!" he said to the officer in the boat. "Miss Price has been scared by a snake. One dropped right into the automobile. She's fainted. There's a stewardess aboard, isn't there?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"And I wish there was a doctor, too. Hold steady!"

He came carefully down the rough ladder, holding the girl with one arm, and stepped into the boat.

"Isn't there anybody else, sir?" queried the yacht's officer curiously.

"No," growled Nick, and then added, "you can get back to the yacht."

"Aye, aye, sir!" and the mate gave the word to his crew.

Nick seated himself in the bow with the girl. She was so slight of figure that he did not mind her weight at all; but he wondered rather grimly what would happen if she should suddenly "wake up" and find herself in his arms, being rowed out to the yacht!

"This may result in a rough-house yet," thought the detective. "But so far it has gone as slick as goose-grease! It's all depending on who happens to be aboard that yacht, I reckon."

This was a question that did rather puzzle the detective, for a fact! He twisted his neck when they shot out of the creek for a sight of the vessel which was their destination. His guess had hit the bull's-eye. It was a steam-yacht with the name in gold under her bow—*Spoondrift*.

The important question as to who was aboard would soon be answered. Nick saw several persons at the rail, but all seemed in uniforms, as near as he could see. He determined, under any condition, to bear the matter off boldly.

The small boat was brought alongside the yacht-steps with a flourish. Nick saw a red-faced man in cap and uniform leaning over the rail and knew that he must be the captain, or sailing-master, of the craft.

The detective did not know just how far the crew of Ian Campbell's yacht, now evidently under Shade's control, would go in the matter of his capture. Whether they were informed who Shade was to take prisoner and bear away, and what it was all about, or not, Nick had no means of guessing.

But as circumstances had come out, there would doubtless be a change in the plans. The red-faced captain gazed on the senseless girl with bulging eyes.

"My goodness! Is she hurt?" he croaked, before Nick stood up with her in his arms.

"She's fainted," replied the detective briefly. "Help me up!"

The captain did not question his command, and aided him over the rail.

"Send the stewardess to wait on her!" was Nick's next words, as he approached the nearest companion-way.

Somebody ran to do this. The captain called after the detective before he left the deck:

"What's to be done, Mr. Shade? Anybody else coming?"

"No. Get under way. Follow the orders you've had," snapped Nick, as he went below.

The masquerade of the detective as the Wall Street man was not suspected by anybody aboard the boat. Nick deposited the girl on the bed in the room which the black stewardess eagerly pointed out.

"Of course, there's no doctor aboard?" asked Nick of the woman.

"'Deed there ain't, sah. Is de lil' missie berry sick?"

"No. She was frightened. She is in no danger, but she may remain senseless for some time. Don't be alarmed."

"You jes' leab her to me. I tak' car' ob her, sah," declared the woman, and Nick went out into the cabin of the yacht to find the red-faced man awaiting him.

The yacht was already under way. She was sweeping around in a big circle and was evidently bound down the river.

The red-faced man removed his cap to polish an egg-shaped and perfectly bald crown with his handkerchief. He wasn't a nice-looking man, being much too squat, and thick, and he had a sandy, drooping mustache which was badly stained by tobacco-juice. But his uniform was natty and he had the confident air of a man used to giving orders and used to having the said orders obeyed.

"Well, sir?" he ejaculated, eying Nick with ferret eyes.

Nick merely grunted, and stared at him through his goggles.

"What went wrong, sir?" asked the man.

"Nothing's gone wrong with me," replied the detective.

"Why—you—well, this ain't all we expected, is it?"

"I never for a moment expected anything different," returned Nick, grimly smiling.

"Say! you don't talk like you did, Mr. Shade," cried the other. "What's up?"

"Perhaps I talk differently because I am *not* Mr. Shade," returned the detective, snatching off his cap and mask.

"What—who the devil are you?" demanded the captain roughly.

"I shouldn't be surprised if you knew me pretty well before you got through with me, skipper," returned Nick. "My name doesn't matter. You expected Mr. Shade to bring a prisoner aboard here, I presume?"

"Heh?" demanded the red-faced man, starting. "Well—that is——"

"No need of lying. The game's up. Be thankful it didn't go any farther and give you a chance to get your fingers burned," interposed the detective sharply. "What do you suppose Mr. Campbell will say to you?"

"I don't know who you are, or what you mean," declared the skipper steadying down, his sly little eyes twinkling. "I ain't done anything outside the orders give me by the owner. Mr. Campbell lent the yacht to Mr. Shade, and instructed me to fulfil *his* commands."

"And were you doing that?"

"I'm doing that now, I suppose. I don't know who you are that comes aboard here to fool us."

"Miss Price will have to stand sponsor for me at present," returned Nick coolly. "And that reminds me. There's a dock at the Crayton Hospital grounds just below the city, isn't there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Stop there. We'll get medical treatment for the young lady, although she is in no danger at present, I believe."

"I'd like to know *who* I'm to take orders from," growled the captain.

"I'll tell you, sir!" exclaimed Nick sharply. "You'll take orders from *me*. You were in a plot to carry off a fellow Shade was going to bring aboard——"

"I wasn't!" exclaimed the skipper. "I don't know what you are talking about. Mr. Shade said he had a sick friend that had to be taken to a retreat——"

"Oh, yes—a *sick* friend. I suppose Shade said he was insane, didn't he?"

"He did mention something about his being crazy at times."

"Just so. So that if he chanced to bring him aboard tied up and gagged, the crew wouldn't think it *too* strange. You are a foxy chap, captain. But you've come near putting your foot in it. I don't know but I'll have you up before the marine board, as it is!"

The red-faced man grew more ruddy were that possible. He opened his lips, and evidently that which lay near the tip of his tongue would not have sounded nice. But something in Nick's expression of countenance stayed him.

"You'll find it will stand you in pretty well to do what I say, Mister Man!" added the detective coolly. "We'll continue this voyage, but you'll take orders from me, and never mind Shade."

"But you—I—what the deuce will I say to Mr. Campbell?" blurted forth the skipper.

"I'll see Campbell and make it all right for you with him," returned Nick carelessly. "He may be required to do a little explaining, too, before this matter is settled. Now we'll go on deck, sir. Let me warn you to take advice of caution, and follow my instructions. I am a lone man here and you have a good crew behind you. It would be the easiest thing in the world for you and your men to overpower me and do as you pleased with me—*for the time being!*

"But let me whisper a word in your ear, skipper," added Nick, looking sternly into his ferret eyes, and shaking his finger under his nose. "After doing *me* you'll need to find some undiscovered country to hide your precious carcasses in, for the power behind me never sleeps, and never lets a criminal escape!"

CHAPTER XI.

"TEN MINUTES TO SPARE."

The skipper of the *Spoondrift* thought he saw a great light! The hint Nick Carter gave him he considered to mean that the detective was engaged in government work—that he was, indeed, a secret service man. One cannot be too careful in matters where the secret service is concerned.

"Well, well! If you put it that way," he said grumblingly. "I reckon I'll speak to Mr. Campbell, anyway. I ain't been to sea, man and boy, for thirty-five years to be ordered about by half a dozen different bosses *now*. What did you say do first, sir?"

"Make your best time to the Crayton Hospital dock."

They went out on deck, and Nick found that the city was already in sight. He stood beside the captain and heard him give the mate the proper orders. In fact, he stuck close to the red-faced man, for he did not know but some trick might be tried against him.

The yacht was run swiftly down past the city and brought into the hospital dock. Nick did not go below to see how Miss Price was, but the stewardess sent up word that the young lady was still unconscious.

"Send up to the hospital for somebody in authority to come down here," commanded the detective, and it was done.

A surgeon came aboard and made an examination of the patient. Nick talked with him aside and related precisely how the accident had happened which resulted in Lora Price's present physical state.

"A peculiar, but not altogether new phase to me," declared the surgeon. "You are her nearest friend, sir?"

"I act for her uncle, Mr. Paul G. Shade, of the Hotel Blank," declared Nick unhesitatingly. "I am bound down the river on important business. What would better be done for Miss Price? Her uncle is still in the city."

As he supposed, the surgeon suggested taking her into the hospital. Nick supplied him with the necessary information, a stretcher was sent for, and in half an hour the *Spoondrift* swung off from the pier again, without the young lady as a passenger.

"I hope she won't consider me too heartless when she wakes up," murmured Nick, smiling grimly.

The girl had been in no danger, the physician said, and, therefore, Nick did not worry much over her. He had known that she answered to the efforts of the hospital doctors, and was conscious within a very few minutes after the yacht left—and in a condition to understand what had happened and to communicate with her uncle, the detective might not have been so easy in his mind as the *Spoondrift* sped down the broad Potomac.

For, having played his game so shrewdly thus far, Nick Carter was not likely to lose this added chance that offered itself. Here he was aboard a swiftly sailing vessel, which was practically under his command. The skipper dared not do otherwise than to take orders from him.

Why not use the vessel to reach Mr. Mark Cameron's estate on the eastern shore of Maryland, on the edge of Tangier Sound? He knew very well where the place was that Amos Ferret—the "Water Ferret"—had told him of. And he had reason to believe that the captain of the *Spoondrift* had been there before.

"If Shade is onto the business that has brought me south—the main point, I mean," muttered Nick, "this is a good dodge. If he has learned in some way that that lost letter of Abe Grout's is still in existence, and that I am after it, no wonder that he tried to put me away. Perhaps he hopes to buy it of old Ferret, if I don't show up. Or he may try to get it on his own hook.

"Anyway, he evidently intended locking me up somewhere for a certain season. Something big is about to be pulled off, and after it, in all probability, Mr. Shade and his associates would be willing to leave the country and drop business for a while—until the hue and cry blew over.

"He evidently considered me hot on his trail. The girl was told that I was queering her with the owner of this yacht. I know that from their talk. So she was willing to aid in putting me away. She may really be in love with Ian Campbell.

"To venture back into Washington before finishing this matter of Abe Grout's letter would be suicidal. Shade evidently has a good deal of influence there. I don't know what further desperate means he might take to down me.

"No! I'm on my way. If this captain cuts up rusty I'll fight. But it looks to me as though, in absence of further orders from either Shade or Campbell, he's likely to be lamblike in his actions."

And the skipper seemed to have no idea of thwarting Nick's demands. When the detective broached the subject of Tangier Sound, the commander of the *Spoondrift* admitted that he knew the waters thereabout well, and that he had been there, in fact, quite recently.

"The other time that Mr. Campbell lent Mr. Shade the yacht we ran in there, sir," said the skipper.

"Then land me at the dock where you tied up that time—Mr. Cameron's dock," said Nick.

"And how long do we hang around there, sir?" demanded the other, in doubt.

"After I am landed I don't care how quick you get back to Washington, or to Baltimore, whichever port you are expected to report at. I shall be through with you," declared Nick.

The *Spoondrift* was a speedy yacht, and she was well found and provisioned, as Nick discovered at luncheon and dinner. The skipper evidently considered it policy—either for his own, or his owner's

sake—to treat the "secret service" man well. The chef did his best in turning out two meals to tempt the passenger's appetite, and as the day was fair, the detective really enjoyed the sail.

"This certainly is away ahead of the trip by regular boat. And I'd have to get off at some small port and run the risk of finding a craft to take me across into the sound. Well, Mr. Shade will be slightly disgusted when he learns of the way in which I have turned the tables on him," thought Nick.

It was growing dusk when they passed between the islands and entered that part of the Chesapeake known as Tangier Sound. The skipper knew the channels, however, and the yacht steamed without faltering to Mr. Cameron's dock. It was still light enough for them to come up to the dock, and for Nick to likewise see that there was no other vessel larger than a catboat in sight. Amos Ferret and his sloop had not arrived, although Nick could observe where the wall along the edge of Mr. Cameron's estate was being built.

Nick was not alone puzzled by the non-appearance of the *Water Ferret* at the rendezvous. He was extremely troubled by this lack of promptness on the diver's part.

Surely, he and his partner had had time to load the sloop and get here in the sort of weather that had been prevalent of late. Nick could not understand it.

He was exceedingly sorry now that he had allowed the *Spoondrift* to bring him to this place, and, above all, that he had told the skipper he might at once make his way back to Washington. If he was held up very long by the divers, waiting for them to appear, what would Shade do, meanwhile, when he knew where Nick was?

Nevertheless, there was nothing for it now but to go ashore when the yacht made the dock, shake hands with the captain and mate, and watch the speedy little vessel turn about and bear into the darkness of the sound again, on her swift way toward the mouth of the Potomac.

Mr. Cameron's summer home was closed. It stood on a hill some distance from the dock, and Nick did not trouble to go near it. On the shore was a little hut, that might have been a fish-house once. When the detective came to it he found that it was being inhabited by a single darky who, at that hour of the night, was half-afraid to let him in.

"Ah suah didn't know w'edder it was a w'ite man, or a coon," declared the fellow, when Nick had finally obtained entrance, and the plank door was barred once more. "Ah ain't got no use fer stray coons. Dey ain't up to no good. An' dese yer t'ings dat's lef' in ma kyar is vallible."

He pointed to certain bulky objects which seemed to be hung from pegs in a dark corner of the room. When Nick's eyes became used to the half-gloom of the place he was almost startled to observe how close a resemblance there was between these "vallible" objects and dead men hanging in chains!

His wit supplied an instant explanation of the phenomena, however.

"Then you work for Mr. Amos Ferret?" he queried.

"Dat I does. I sometimes cooks fer dem abo'd deir *Water Ferret*. But ol' Amos, he's de kantankerest man yo' eber see! Sometimes he wouldn't call grub good ef hit war cooked by de angel Gabriel hisself! So den he put me out of de galley an' dey goes widout deir cook.

"But nebber mind!" chuckled the darky. "He'll be glad enough ter quit cookin' w'en he gets back. I done t'rowed all de salt an' bakin'-powder erway befo' dey sailed, an' I stuffed he's ol' sou'wester in de chimbley so't de stove won't drawer.

"He said I could stay here an' watch de truck. But w'en he git back dey'll be glad enough ter have me git 'em a decent meal of vittles—yah-hyah-hyah!"

"I take it you're expecting them soon?" queried Nick.

"I is, sah. Dey oughter be down yist'day. Dey must come ter-morrer I sh'd say. I reckon yo' wants ter see Amos?"

"I certainly do."

"An' dere's been anudder gemmen lookin' fo' him, too."

"Indeed?"

"Yas, sah! He ain't done got hisself inter trouble, has he?"

"Would you be sorry?" asked Nick, smiling.

"Waal, I'd be sorry not ter know erbout it," admitted the darky, grinning broadly.

"There's no love lost between you, then?"

"I dunno 'bout dat. Dere's wuss w'ite men dan old Amos, on'y I ain't nebber wo'ked fo' dem. Is he been stealin', 'r anyt'ing?"

"Not that I know of."

"D'ye know de odder man wot axed fo' him yisterday an' de day befo', sah?"

"I couldn't really say. I might. At any rate, I want to make it worth your while to say nothing to him about *me* if he comes back again."

"Now yo's talkin' like er w'ite man should." declared the cook of the *Water Ferret*, broadly grinning again as he transferred the bank-note Nick handed him to his pocket.

"And I want to arrange to stay here all night."

"Yo' can do dat an' welcome, boss. It's lonesome

as Dog's Holler here, an' dey say dere ain't been a man, woman, or chile t'rough *dat* place fer a hunder' y'ars! I'se glad ter hab yo,' an' proud ob yo' comp'ny."

Nick got no sleep that night. He practically kept watch while the darky rolled up in a blanket and snored. Before light of a blowy morning the detective was up and out, tramping the wind-swept breakwater, watching the sound for the appearance of any craft that looked like a sloop of the size of the *Water Ferret*.

He did not look in vain. With the coming of the sun came also a good-sized sloop, flying in with swelling canvas.

"Dat's sho' 'nough de old *Water Ferret*," declared the marooned cook, who had come out to call Nick to breakfast. "I reckon I better be gittin' a big meal of vittles ready. Dem fellers will be po'ful hungry, an' I *knows* ole Amos jes' erbout starbed dem!"

In half an hour the sloop dropped her anchor off the new wall and her canvas came down on the run. She had a small crew—only three men. One Nick recognized as Amos Ferret, the captain. His partner was pointed out by the cook as a tall, slab-sided man who wore a derby. The other was the "crew."

The party came ashore before eight o'clock, and, as the darky had said, were all ravenously hungry.

"It does seem," complained Amos Ferret, as he saw his partner and hired man sail into the negro's biscuit and fried pork, "as though them fellers couldn't appreciate good cookin'. I sartainly did my best, and even Bill here," motioning toward his partner, "found words to kick in. I s'pose we'll have to take this black poisoner back.

"Hullo! Mr. Carter, I declare!" as Nick showed up before the breakfast was finished. "I—I jest didn't expect you here quite yet."

He seemed somewhat confused and not at all happy in his mind, but Nick bided his time.

"I certainly expected *you* here before this," he said calmly.

"Well, we was held up fer material. An' other things. Now, I s'pose you're here arter what I spoke of up to New York?"

"I most certainly am."

"Well, I—we—— that is, let's go out an' talk it over," he stammered.

"Let's get your diving-suits out and take a look for the thing," said Nick firmly.

"Well, I s'pose I *can* go down to-day. But I was thinkin'——"

"Of course you can go down. And so can I," returned Nick, eying him sharply.

"My goodness me! you wouldn't think of such a thing, would you?"

"Not only think of it, but do it, Mr. Ferret."

"Why, it's no small job——"

"I'll go down with you, Ferret. And don't let's have any argument over it. I see that your partner is a man much of my size. I'll wear his suit."

"Waal, I guess any of the suits would fit yer, Mr. Carter," said Ferret, with a grim chuckle. "Ye see, they ain't what you'd call built *snug*. No, indeed!"

Nick had begun to suspect how the land lay. In some mysterious way Shade, or Grout, had learned about the letter held in the oyster-shell, and they had tampered with the honest Mr. Ferret.

Nick was sure the fellow had not been below to get the letter, but he might have it in his mind to sell the precious parchment to Shade or his brother plotter.

He determined to watch the diver closely, and he gave him no opportunity of communicating with his partner or the other men. Nick hung right to him while they took the suits out on the float and rigged the pipe-lines and pump. He even saw to it that his own air-pipe was being attached to the same pump as that of Amos Ferret's. He did not fancy making the descent and then finding himself without an adequate supply of air when he got to the bottom.

While they were getting into their suits the darky came along by the float, and sang out:

"Dere's a steamboat comin' in yere—an' she's comin' kitin'. Likely she's comin' fer yo', boss?"

Amos took a long squint at the approaching boat. He looked excited when he sat down again to have his partner screw on the helmet.

"That looks like that *Spoondrift* that was in here before, Mr. Carter," he said meaningly. "Hadn't we better wait and see what they want?"

"I haven't the least doubt but that it *is* the yacht," returned Nick quickly. "But we won't wait."

"Yer think we'd better not, sir?"

"I'm blamed sure we won't, Ferret!" exclaimed Nick, standing up himself to look at the yacht. "She's not here yet. We've got ten minutes to spare. And I've heard tell, somewhere, that a lot can be done in ten minutes. Stand ready there, Bill, to put my helmet on. Is that my bar? I want it ready to my hand. Don't go down too far ahead of me, Ferret. We will make the descent together—and we'll likewise see what there is to be seen down there together!"

CHAPTER XII.

AHEAD OF THE GAME.

This was not Nick Carter's first descent in a diving-suit. But unless regularly employed in such a trade, the going down into the sea is an event bound to strongly affect one's nerves.

The fact of the green water closing over a man's head, of his continuing to breathe, to see, to feel, and even to hear, to a certain extent, while entirely buried in the element, is an awe-inspiring fact.

Under the present conditions, however, the detective felt nothing but anxiety. He did not know whether Ferret would dare to play him false; but he was suspicious. And it was in the power of the diver and his partner—if both had been bribed by Paul Shade—to finish *his* career right then and there.

However, to gain his end—to make a try for the securing of the paper which Amos Ferret had declared existed—Nick saw no other way than to go down himself and "keep tabs" on the old diver.

In sight was the *Spoondrift*, which craft Nick had reason to suppose might be used again by his enemies. Its reappearance in the Tangier inlet spelled nothing but ruin to Nick's venture, unless he could get hold of that lost letter of Abe Grout's before the arrival of these others who likewise desired it.

To fail might set him back in his work for months. Nick did not know just how valuable the letter would be to him; but it would undoubtedly give him a hold on Grout that the gambler did not desire anybody to have.

It seemed, therefore, that Nick Carter might be risking much to gain but little! He was venturing his life to secure a clue that would perhaps be of value to him and perhaps not. He would be satisfied, however, if the letter signed by Abe Grout merely proved him to be the moneyed force behind Blaney, Lowell & Co., the Wall Street stock-brokers.

These were the thoughts that spurred Nick on. He followed Amos Ferret down the short iron ladder, and, as he had done, dropped off into the deep water.

The diver had said that they were not working at any great depth along this breakwater; but he had failed to mention that the undertow in some places was terrific. This was why the wall was being built.

It seemed to Nick, even with his lead-weighted shoes, that he could not retain his footing on the bottom of the sound. He swayed and staggered with the motion of the current and had not Amos looked back, seen his plight, and given him a steadying hand, the detective might have been carried away helplessly.

He saw old Amos grinning at him through the glass front of his helmet, and it made him mad. Amos pointed upward, as though asking him if he would go back. Nick, however, shook his head—or, rather, wagged it from side to side, in a slow negative, and then the fresh air poured in from above, and he began to feel better.

His ears still buzzed, and the pressure against his head was very great; but he would not give up now, when so near satisfying his mind regarding the prize. He motioned Amos to lead the way.

The diver might, of course, claim to be unable to find the oyster and the paper it held; but he had already told Nick that it was near the spot where he and his partner were going up and down, and Nick had been sharp enough to find out that the float had not been moved. The paper, if still in existence, must be somewhere near this place, and there was plenty of light, at this slight depth, to enable him to see a good distance in the water.

He followed close at Ferret's side, determined that the man, if so inclined, should play him no trick. And suddenly Amos touched him and pointed. Nick turned his head to look.

In a rather narrow crack between two parts of a split boulder, something white swayed lightly with the action of the water. It was not weed, or other growing vegetable-matter, nor was it a fish.

Nick looked into Amos Ferret's face, and saw the latter nod and smile. They went nearer, and Nick had a better view.

Several oysters were clinging to the rocks, but one particularly large bivalve was wedged deep in the narrow crack. His shell-lips were tightly shut, and fluttering from them was, as Ferret had reported, a torn piece of paper, some five inches long, and the size of a large letter-sheet.

As the water surged around the rock the paper seemed to move like a pennant in the wind. It was sheltered sufficiently by the sides of the crack, however, so that it would not easily be torn away. Especially as the oyster kept shut and the paper itself was of a tough and superior quality.

Nick bent eagerly forward and saw the writing on the sheet. As Ferret had prophesied, this was easily read. Every letter stood out with distinctness, including the signature, "Abram Grout," at the bottom.

And the detective was delighted to learn that this submarine clue was important, indeed. At least, it

would be good evidence as to Abe Grout's power in the firm of Blaney, Lowell & Co., and his power over Paul G. Shade. Both the firm and Shade's name were mentioned in the torn letter in such a way that these facts could not be mistaken.

Nick experienced a slight pang of disappointment, however. He realized at once that whatever had been Abe's instructions in the letter, they were in the part that had remained in Shade's possession when it had been torn. That the letter was regarding some tricky matter which was about to be pulled off there could be no doubt; but what that matter was, the part of the document in the possession of the bivalve did not reveal.

As a piece of evidence to help him in his pursuit of the Wall Street tricksters, this submarine clue was all-important. Abe Grout must come out in the open and fight, with this letter against him; or else he would have to absolutely get out of the Blaney, Lowell & Co.'s affairs. Of these facts Nick was sure.

But he gave but a moment or two to such thoughts. He crowded in ahead of Ferret, and with his bar pried off the big oyster and caught it in his gloved hand before it could fall into the bottom of the crevice. He had secured the prize without injuring the paper.

The old diver touched him and Nick, when he looked around, saw that Ferret's face was broadly agrin. Something had suddenly pleased the man, and, remembering his fears regarding his honesty, the detective half-expected some trick.

What would happen when they went up to the surface again? Would Shade, or somebody representing he and Grout, be there to wrest the paper from him? It was a serious predicament, yet Nick did not see of what good any further lingering in the depths would do!

So he motioned Amos to return, and they proceeded to the ladder, signaled to be drawn up, and when he touched the bottom rounds of the iron ladder, Nick scrambled out upon the float as rapidly as possible.

He clung to the oyster, and he kept it in sight as he sat down upon a box and waited for Ferret's partner to unscrew his helmet. They seemed unconscionably tardy in doing this; but at last the detective was released.

The wet, almost pulpy, paper was in his hand. It would be all right when it was dry, and the writing remain perfectly readable. He was sure of that.

And there was Ferret's hard old face appearing out of *his* suit of armor, too. The first words the old diver said amazed Nick.

"Well, holy heavers! I never did expect fer see you git it, Mr. Carter. And that's a fac'. Now, that we're all right, I'll tell ye wot scare't me.

"After I had seen yer in New York I found that wherever I went some swab was always taggin' me. I couldn't get out of sight of either one land-shark, or another. An' 'twas the same when I got back to Baltimore. I had to h'ist one of the barnacles off'n the rail of the *Water Ferret* with me boot. Wanted ter ship with us, he said. And he didn't know a handspike from the keelson!

"Well, I admit I was plum' worried. And what did I do but go agin' your sailin' orders. I told somebody about the blamed paper."

"What's that?" exclaimed Nick.

"Yes, I did."

"Who did you tell?"

"Bill, here—old Bill. My partner," said Ferret, sorrowfully, looking at the slab-sided one, whose face was as expressionless as a graven image.

"And then," said Amos, still sorrowfully, "and then, Bill went and got drunk. Yessir! got drunk."

At that Bill opened his lips—for the first time during the incident, and the last time, too.

"One in two year. Had a right to. Comin' to me," he growled, but without the flutter of an eyelash.

"But you didn't have no right to go off with a stranger and load up to the guards, and keep the *Water Ferret* in port two days over time. No, you hadn't!

"And ye see, Mr. Carter," added Ferret, turning to Nick again, and continuing his explanation, "when Bill gits full he talks. Talks—oh, thunder! The words jest gush out o' him. Here he's been sober for goin' on two year. All the language he *ain't* used durin' that time jest come to the surface of Bill, and slopped over! Language pours from him in a torrent like Niagara, when Bill is elevated. And you can bet that everything he ever knew, from the time he began to take notice of his little pink toes in the cradle up to the hour before he took the bits in his teeth an' begun ter drink to excess, as ye might say—well, it all had ter come out of Bill!

"I knew he'd told the land-shark as had tolled him off all about what I'd said regardin' the paper. I reckon whoever was employin' the swab would send down here an' rake over the hull sound for the thing. But I reckon they didn't know jest how to git at it without *me*, an' they couldn't git *me* drunk, though the cook says there was a man lookin' around here for me."

Nick had listened to this tale with varying emotions. He was glad to find that Ferret was honest. And he saw now through the attempt that had been made by Shade to either injure him, or to hold him captive for a while.

Everybody who talked with Nick was being watched and shadowed by the spies in the employ of Shade and Grout. Naturally, a man like Ferret, going from Cameron to the detective, would pique their curiosity.

Then, with what the drunken Bill had let drop regarding Ferret's discovery of the important submarine clue, the tricksters were anxious to hold Nick back until they could either bribe Ferret, obtain the paper themselves, or be sure that the action of the sea had destroyed it.

"But they've got mightily left—— Hello! what's this?" and Nick stood up, holding tight to the oyster, which held tight to the paper, and faced the red-faced captain of the *Spoondrift*.

During the past few moments he had forgotten all about the yacht, whose appearance had been hailed before Nick and Ferret had gone down after the paper.

"You're Mr. Nick Carter, are you, sir?" asked the captain of the yacht.

"You ought to know me, my man," returned the detective coolly.

"You didn't give me your name, you know," said the other, quite as though that fact had offended him. "And I didn't scarcely know you in them togs."

He fetched out a letter and handed it to the detective. The latter tore it open and found it written on the paper of the Blank Hotel, and reading as follows:

"MR. NICHOLAS CARTER.

"DEAR SIR: I regret that Captain Henry, commander of the *Spoondrift*, should have left you so discourteously at Mr. Mark Cameron's estate. I am personally acquainted with Mr. Cameron and know that at this time of year there is no easy means of getting from his place to the city. The *Spoondrift* is at your command, and I beg of you to make use of it as you may see fit.

"Another friend of mine, Mr. Reginald Pyle, has informed me of certain matters of which I was ignorant regarding Mr. Paul G. Shade. Mr. Shade had borrowed my yacht, but not with my permission to use it as seemed to be the intention, if Captain Henry is truthfully informed. I regret that I appeared to countenance any attempt upon your peace of mind.

"If you return through Baltimore I would be glad to see you personally. Begging your pardon again, I remain, sincerely, IAN CAMPBELL.

"Hotel Blank, Washington."

Nick read this through twice with a grave face. Under the formal phrases he believed he read something deeper. The young man, Ian Campbell, who had come near being roped into trouble by Shade, perhaps had really fallen in love with Shade's niece. His pride was hurt. Perhaps he was heartsore, too. And there was the girl herself. Had she not shown plainly that she was deeply interested in Ian Campbell?

"By Jove!" muttered the detective, "I *will* stop on my way back and tip the youngster off to something about the girl that may interest him. She's in her uncle's power; but with judicious management, couldn't that tie be broken? I believe she's altogether too fine a creature to go wrong. Out from under Paul Shade's influence, Lora Price would be a fit mate for the best man who walks!"

Then he turned to the red-faced captain, and said:

"All right, skipper. I'll be glad to accept your owner's offer. If you don't mind, we'll start in an hour for Baltimore."

Nick left the "Water Ferret," Amos, the diver, with the promise of ample payment for his part in the recovery of the submarine clue. That paper, Nick knew, would give him the first real advantage he had had over the Blaney-Lowell people.

"And now we'll make 'em sweat!" he thought, while the yacht was speeding up the bay. "But, thunder! I'll have to write Pyle that I've been able to find nothing about Judge Bernard. *That* thread has not come to my hand, it is sure.

"Nor, by Jove! the reason for Shade and his niece to masquerade in Washington as Mr. and Mrs. Furtz. Ah! those mysteries may be of the one piece. All in good time. I have accomplished my present mission. The submarine clue is in my hands, and that is all I started out to gain.

"I should be satisfied. Shade and Grout will be on the run now, and—*Nick Carter will be after them!*"

THE END.

That eventually Nick did accomplish all that was asked of him by the president, the reader can rest assured. But those matters can well be left for another time, and the reader will learn more about them in our next issue, Number 617, which will be entitled, "Under the Flag of Chance; or, Nick Carter's Phenomenal Stock Deal."

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THE BLUE CAP.

By ROGER STARBUCK.

The ship *Hercules*, of New London, was passing the Galapagos, in the Pacific Ocean. It was night, and the watch were lounging about the windlass, some of them spinning yarns, others singing, and a few snoring.

Above them the topsails were filled by the breeze which was blowing from the southwest. The waves roared around the bows; the moonlight shone softly upon the scattered spray-drops, and the "phosphor" gleam of the foam was bright in the vessel's wake.

"Gentlemen," said one of the men, addressing several rough-looking sailors in canvas jackets, "suppose we have a dance."

"Aye, aye, a dance, a dance!" shouted the canvas-jackets.

"No—no," said a little old man wearing a blue cap and thick woolen stockings; "gentlemen, don't dance over people's heads. There's the watch below, remember, fast asleep."

"They danced over our heads t'other night," exclaimed one of the canvas-jackets, "and it's only right that we should pay 'em back the compliment."

"Aye, aye, give it to 'em in their own coin!" cried his two chums.

"If you will do it, you will" said the blue cap mournfully, as he proceeded to stuff some pieces of cotton into his ears; "but I can tell you that my head feels as if it were ready to split now, and if you make a racket upon the deck with those heavy boots of yours, goodness only knows what will become of me!"

"Ho, ho, ho! so you've brought yourself out, old man," shouted one of his shipmates; "it is not on account of the watch below, but on your own, that you don't want us to dance."

"On both," replied the blue cap.

"There's human natur'," said an old tar philosophically.

"Aye, aye, there's human natur', and——"

"If let him shut himself up in his chest, if he don't want to hear the noise of our dancing," interrupted another, "that's the best place for him."

"Aye, aye, we'll put him in his chest—we'll lock him up in his own chest!" cried one of the canvas jackets.

This proposal was received with shouts of approbation.

"You'll smother me to death if you shut me up in my chest—you will, indeed!" exclaimed the blue cap, in piteous accents.

"Oh, no—you know better than that; there's a knot-hole in the lid which will let in enough air for your breathin'," said a big, burly fellow, with enormous feet.

"Oh, yes, he'll be comfortable enough," said another.

"And won't care to oppose us again," observed a dapper-looking tar with a shrill voice; "if he don't want to hear a noise, why did he ship?"

And so, in spite of the protestations of the old man, his rough shipmates lifted him from the deck and deposited him in his empty chest which he had recently painted very carefully and placed upon the forecastle deck to dry. Having locked it with a key taken from the old man's pocket, his persecutors commenced one of those wild and peculiar dances which are performed by the South Sea Islanders. While they were thus occupied dark clouds swept over the moon and the stars, the wind rose howling and shrieking; the ship dashed through the foaming waters like a mad bull.

At last the order to take in sail was given by the officer of the watch. The men flew to halyards and clew-lines, and in a short time the vessel was rolling along under a close-reefed maintopsail and topmast-staysail. Suddenly a heavy sea swept her decks, carrying away a portion of the cook's galley and sweeping the chest upon the forecastle far away to leeward.

"The blue cap!" shrieked the seamen, rushing toward the quarter-deck, and confronting the officer of the watch; "the blue cap is in that chest that's gone overboard!"

"You miserable, lubber-headed villains, how dared you shut the poor fellow up in that way?" cried the officer, who was a humane man. "You deserve to be strung up to the yard-arm for sich a trick! I am half a mind to have ye all flogged within an inch of your lives! Down with that quarter-boat at once!"

The boat was lowered and manned. It was soon careering over the tops of the waves in the direction of the floating chest, which could be faintly distinguished every now and then as it was topped upon the crest of some phosphor-lighted billow.

"The old man is light," remarked one of the seamen; "he is so withered and so dried up that he don't weigh more than a hundred pounds; so the chest, bein' a big one, will keep afloat till we get to it."

"I'm not so sure of that," exclaimed the second mate, who headed the boat; "and even if we do succeed in reaching it, I'm afraid we'll find the poor fellow within almost dead with fright. It was a shameful trick, your shutting him up in that manner."

The men pulled with a will, and the boat's bow at last came in contact with the chest. As no noise was heard to proceed from it, the men believed that the old man had swooned away from terror. They pulled it into the boat; and the key being still in the lock, as they had left it, the chest was opened.

As the rays of the boat-lantern flashed into it, however, a simultaneous cry of astonishment and horror burst from the spectators, for there was no trace left of the prisoner, except his blue cap and a few threads of thin gray hair.

"It's a judgment upon us! Aye, aye, a judgment!" cried one of the sailors. "The old man has melted or withered away in the chest."

The looks of his shipmates took violently; nearly dumb with terror, they could not utter a word, but stood staring upon the empty chest with open mouths and distorted eyes.

"Poke to your oars, men!" cried the second officer, "and pull for your lives! We are aboard the vessel may be shot!"

"I don't see how," said the sailor who had taken charge of the chest; "the old man's dead, and the poor fellow couldn't have got out."

The ship was soon gained, but still no conclusion could be arrived at, except that the old man had melted or withered away in the chest.

Such, in fact, is the belief to this day of the men who witnessed the singular occurrence described; but I must own that I cannot help having my doubts about this "marvelous phenomenon."

I have often thought that the chest might have been slyly opened by the ship's cabin-boy, and locked again after, the old man had sprung out, and that the poor fellow, in order to escape further persecution, might have jumped overboard unobserved by his shipmates.

The cabin-boy, being a native of Manila, and unable to speak a word of English, could not have made any satisfactory explanations.

HOW TO MAKE A WATER-TELESCOPE.

The water-telescope may be made of wood or tin, as you prefer. The tin is better, but the wood is easier made, although both are of simple construction. Suppose we describe the wooden one first. Take four strips of wood, an inch thick, three feet long, and of a width widening from twelve inches at the top to twenty inches at the bottom. Make a tube from these pieces, taking care to make the seams water-tight with putty and paint. In the large end fix a sheet of glass, cemented firmly and made water-tight, and leave the small end open. To make a tin water-telescope, get a tinsmith to make for you—or make it yourself, if you can—a funnel-shaped tin horn, about three feet long, ten or twelve inches in diameter at the small end, and twenty inches in diameter at the large end. In the large end fix a sheet of glass, and if you cannot use a round piece, make the large end of the funnel square. That is all there is to make about the water-telescope, except that the inside should be stained black, and that it is advisable to attach weights or sinkers to the outside of the large end, to make it easier to submerge. To use this telescope, sink the large end down in the water about two feet, and put your head in the small end and look. You will be astonished at the plainness with which you will see all kinds of fish, water-animals, and plants, and at the depth to which your vision will penetrate. Of course, you cannot see very far through troubled water, any more than you could see the stars through the clouds; and, besides, it would not be very safe or pleasant to lean over the side of a boat with your head in a tube during the prevalence of a choppy sea. But during a calm, delightful summer excursion on the water, on boating and picnic-parties, you can imagine how much such a contrivance would add to your pleasure, to say nothing of the instruction derived from studying the habits of the creatures of the water at home; and all this at a small cost. We may add that fishermen generally are conversant with this instrument, which they call a "water-glass," but which might, with more propriety, be called a "water-telescope." However, that would amount to the same thing to a seafaring man, who always refers to a telescope simply as a "glass." Sponge-fishers use the instrument in their business, and could not get along very well without it.

ARCTIC PERILS.

Voyagers in Alaskan and Arctic waters have some queer and often dangerous experiences among the ice-fields and bergs, which, moved by varying winds and currents, drift about in a most erratic fashion. For days there will be no ice in sight, and then, within a few hours, the ship will be surrounded by it. Ten years ago the steam whaler *Bowhead* furnished an instance of the uncertainty that attends navigation in these waters.

She had been lucky in securing whales, and, while still continuing her operations, had shipped a great quantity of bone to San Francisco. One day, her captain wishing to repair the boiler, which was leaking, blew off steam, and as the afternoon was dead calm, and no other ice was in sight, made the steamer fast to an iceberg.

As the *Bowhead* lay thus helpless, having neither wind nor steam, a floe appeared bearing straight down upon her. She crashed against the iceberg, and her stern was cut completely off, so that she sank within fifteen minutes. There was barely time for all hands to get out of her upon the ice, where later they were taken off by another whaler.

The United States revenue steamer *Corwin* had some narrow escapes in her early voyaging in the Behring Sea. Three times she was abandoned in the pack, but somehow always avoided disaster, and brought her company safely home. Perhaps the closest shave she ever had occurred one fine day in the summer of 1885, when, being short of fresh water, her captain laid her port bow alongside an iceberg, and sent the men to a basin upon the ice with buckets to pass the water down.

The ship's stern was swung some fifty feet away from the iceberg, and her boats on that side were lowered. The sea was as smooth as glass, and as the taking aboard of water required little supervision, everything was quiet on the quarter-deck. The captain was below reading. Lieutenant Kennedy, in the shaft-alley, was developing photographic plates. In the port gangway Lieutenant Cantwell was busy skinning a bird, while most of the other officers were distributed around below decks, reading, writing, or sleeping.

Suddenly, without warning, a part of the iceberg, weighing at least one hundred tons, split off, and fell with a thundering splash just between the ship and the berg. It missed the *Corwin* by about three feet, but the lurch of the ship in the tremendous surge was something that no one on board will ever forget.

Cantwell, with his bird, went heels-over-head to leeward; the captain was thrown from the cabin transom to the floor; and when Kennedy appeared from the shaft-alley, with a dry plate in one hand and a bottle of developing-mixture in the other, his manner certainly lacked repose. But few of the ship's company saw the fall of the huge fragment; and the others, unable to imagine what had happened, were filled with consternation.

In two or three seconds the submerged mass of ice came up directly under the *Corwin's* keel, lifted her stern into the air, and sent her bows down till the water was up to the fore-hatch. The steamer slid off the smooth lump head-first, as if she were going to the bottom, but righted herself and shook the water from her decks.

Finding the ship unhurt, with only the line parted, the crew regained their presence of mind, made the vessel fast to the berg again, and completed the taking aboard of water without further mishap.

COMPANIONABLE HUMMING-BIRDS.

So unafraid are humming-birds of man that they will readily enter open windows of houses, if they see flowers within. I have read of their even visiting the artificial flowers on a lady's hat when she was out walking, and other writers speak of their taking sugar from between a person's lips. In a room they become confused, and, being so frail, are apt to injure themselves by striking against objects. More than once I, or members of my family, have caught the frightened little waifs for their good, and released them into the open air. It is of no use to try to keep them in captivity, unless, possibly, it were a greenhouse where there were plenty of flowers, for no artificial food has ever been found which will nourish them. Yet even there they would probably kill themselves by flying against the glass.

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